Sevens

5 - The Fifth Generation was an Animal Lover, and Quite the Efficient Player

Wai

Prologue

Within a coupled carriage on course to Centralle.

With my eyes closed, I slept and sent my consciousness into the blue Jewel hanging at my neck.

The conference room had a round table, with chairs stationed around its circumference.

At one point on it, a large silver sword floated above the table.

“Um… even if you called me here, well…”

There, I,【Lyle Walt】was being looked upon by the fed up faces of my ancestors.

Most were sitting in their chairs looking in my direction, but only the second was standing.

The one taking on the appearance of a hunter was a memory stored within this Jerel given form.

Following the father of the provincial Noble Walt House, the one who had become the Second Generation of the family,【Crassel Walt】spoke.

“I’ll be having you do it today as well. Come to my room.”

After that short line, perhaps he had been irritated, as the Second headed straight off to the door behind his chair.

The Third Generation looked at me, and motioned for me to follow with all due haste.

“Now off with you. Really…”

Leaving behind the tired heads of history, I started off to the door the Second had entered.

(No, but… there’s no helping it, is there?)

There was but one reason they all seemed so worn out.

It’s because I had failed in learning a Skill.

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The Second’s memory.

Unlike the First’s time, it was a memory where the fighting was never to die out.

There was no bloodshed.

It was a war among villagers, and the antipathy of the area’s feudal lord, the Second Generation head.

“The First Generation handled things so much better. He had that strength of his, too!”
“That man’d always take the initiative, and take action himself, you know.”
“I really wonder how his successor turned out to be something like that!”

The Second Generation walked down the farm roads, and I followed behind him.

Around us, were villagers, purposely raising their voices to levels we could hear.

Having just inherited the territory, it wasn’t field work the Second was taking part in. With his subordinates behind, he went around hammering wooden stakes into the ground.

I looked upon the scene, and spoke.

“It was like this last time too, but this scene is…”

While he seemed to be in a bad mood, the Second did answer.

“I had just taken over. I had no idea what the right thing to do was. Therefore, I tried putting in order the fields that had been nothing but a complete mess for a start.”

At the time the founder was the lord.

The fields and houses that made up the village of the Walt House had an overly complex arrangement.

They just expanded because they were able to. That's the sort of impression they gave off.

Of that, in order to make them easier to manage, the Second attempted to get them in order.

"And he's supposed to be *that* man's son…?"

Beside the young Second, who was carrying out his work, the fief whispered amongst themselves as they passed by.

The young Second was gritting his teeth.

He seemed quite vexed.

The Second began explaining the situation to me.

"What the villagers were expecting when I took over, was someone to mediate the fighting. Who's field is who's? Who's the bastard damming up the water? There were plenty of pointless quarrels. During the First's time, they had just tolerated it. Because that person… my old man was strong."

Compared to the First Generation, the Second seemed to be one of whom you could talk to.

First Generation Basil Walt was a barbarian styled man, who used beast skins as his overcoat.

His arms were wide, and his weapon was that hunk of a sword. It seems none of the villagers felt to go against him.

"He was strong, and he took the initiative when it came to work… despite this and that, my reliable old man was the adoration of all the villagers."

And when that was gone, all the dissatisfaction that had been building up was to burst out all at once.

A need to mediate the quarrels. Who had ownership of what land… he was forced to hand down such judgement, but it seems that the villagers were dissatisfied with that as well.

Unaccepted by the generation that remembered the First, the Second continued to struggle to raise up the succeeding generations.

As we left the outskirts of the village, the Second turned back to me.

“Well then, shall we start… You can accomplish my【All】Skill’s second level, right?”

“It covers an even wider range than before, and allows others the use Skills to a large group, right?”

The defining feature of the Second Generation’s Skill was that it truly was specialized to support.

When I took its secondary effects to mind, I found myself favoring those more than its main use.

Its Second Stage made it so if you gathered all your surrounding comrades in a single spot, they could all activate Skills together.

“It does increase your perception even further, but it still isn’t on the level of the Fifth’s. It’s quite suited for close range detection, though.”

As I said that, I turned my eyes to the enemy I had detected with it.

There, the form of a rabbit growing a horn from its head…

“Sh-!”

… Was visible for a brief moment, but the second had immediately notched and fired an arrow at it.

As could be implied from his hunter-esque garb, the weapon the Second held was a bow.

Monsters… he seemed to hate horned rabbits to a particularly high level, so whenever I found them, he would often end up arguing with the Fifth.

To the First through third who took care of the field work, horned rabbits were hell incarnate.

Them laying waste to the fields meant a decline in crops.

“Looks like it’s become a conditioned response for you. And wait, this is just a memory, right?”

Wasn’t I the one who was supposed to be sensing the monsters?

As I said that, the Second responded in an irritated tone.

“Just looking at them irritates me, but it seems they’ve left a strong impression on my memory… that’s why, like this…”

Right after saying that, another horned rabbit had appeared, so the Second shot it to death.

His skills with the bow were amazing.

I could also use one, but I had nowhere near as much technique as the Second.

He put away his bow, and looked to me.

“Now then, about the Third Stage,【Select】, that you keep failing in.”

Select… the Second Generation’s Skill’s third stage, it allowed for a wide number of highly separated comrades to all use Skills.

Its amazing point was that it could work over such a range, while automatically distinguishing between friend and foe.

Meaning it made aiming quite easy.

In a muddled battlefield of allies and others, a use of its secondary ability could instantly put one at an advantage.

With magic raining down on a massive scale, you could make it so it onle came down on the enemy.

It’s that sort of amazing ability, but…

“No, that’s…”

I did concentrate on using the Skill, but nothing happened.

The Second cried out.

“Why can’t you do it!? That’s totally impossible, I’m telling ya’! If you’ve even been able to master the Third’s Mind Skill, not being able to use my Skill should be impossible!”

If you put it in scale of ease of acquisition, the First’s and Second’s third stages were much less trouble than the other Skills.

Even so, I continued to fail on activating the Skill.

“No, I do feel something starting up. It’s just that right before it comes down to activating it, it fails, or how should I put it…”

“And I’m telling you that’s strange! Dammit, you’ve been able to learn all the other Skills on the first try, so not being able to go on here is…”

Before the Second’s dejection, I realized that a part of me was feeling a bit of relief.

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Inside the rattle and shake of the coupled carriage, I opened my eyes, and looked out the window.

Just riding aboard a moving vehicle was somewhat tiring.

Around, there were plenty of customers, who had fallen asleep like me.

Outside the glass pane, there were mounted soldiers and adventurers serving as guards.

As this was a carriage set for the imperial capital Centralle, there was no shortage of passengers.

With not an empty seat to be found, the reason so many paid such a fortune in silver coins to hitch a ride was due to the existence of monsters and bandits.

That’s just how much value a safe travel held.

I’ve just come to learn of it recently.

Looking to my side, a blond haired twin-tailed maid-dressed Poyopoyo… ah, right, Monika, was at work knitting something.

Seeing that, I thought to myself.

(So it’s already that season, is it?)

I did feel a chill on my skin, but day by day, the cold was getting more severe.

Since I left my home territory, the Walt House, more than half a year has passed.

Winter was already right upon us.

At the start, quite a few had sent curious glances at Monica, but after a few days’ travels, perhaps they had grown accustomed to it, as no one paid any mind to her maid attire anymore.

We only occasionally see the surprised faces of those getting on at the towns and villages we stop at along the way.

The girl was not a human.

An automaton built by an ancient race, revived by a pervert referred to as one of the Seven Great of Arumsaas’ Academy.

The fruit of technology long lost, and according to the machine herself, a ‘Special Model.’

And there, Monica noticed my glance.

“What is it, chicken dickhead? Could it be that you have gone into heat upon seeing my lovely figure? Oh good grief… why must it be in a place like this.”

As Monica proceeded to try removing her clothing, I put all my power into hitting the top of her head.

She’s a machine, so she might break? I did think that, but… as I

picked up from her tone of voice, I'm sure she's already broken.

"Why do you always have to be like that? More importantly, what are you making there?"

Looking back at her handiwork, Monica spoke.

"Is it not obvious? I'm putting all sorts of emotion into making this 'heavy muffler'. When the wielder of this piece of equipment thinks of just what feelings have been put into making this, they won't be able to help but feel the weight of my love and the encroaching feeling of responsibility. Ah~ what a heavy muffler it shall be."

"I see. You sure have it rough."

I try to treat it as someone else's problem, but Monica began to tremble incessantly.

"No, please don't make put up an SEP field there. Can you truly not understand who's giving what to whom unless I put it into words? You really are the worst, damn chicken."

As I continued to show off my lack of interest, Monica whispered to me.

"… Speak now, or I'll add on a heavy sweater, and heavy gloves."

Saying that, shwe began churning out the rest of the muffler at breakneck pace.

"Quit it, fool."

I spoke while conscious of the surrounding eyes on Monica, and looked to the ceiling.

The trip was one that took several days, and while it did give off a sense of security, it also felt quite inconvenient.

I turned my gaze to the Jewel hanging at my neck.

The blue crystal resting on the palm of my hand was decorated with glittering silver ornaments, and hung onto a chain.

Skills were something that existed as one Skill per person.

That being the case, there were a few ways to be able to make use of multiple of them. Besides using【Gems】like what the Jewel once was, there were also items that could be imbued with Skills called【Magic Tools】.

There were plenty of varieties, weapons and armor, and rather than Gems, where it was quite easy for one Skill to interfere with another, Magic Tools had become the standard form.

By adding the right Skills together, it was possible to display quite a large effect, and while the price for them was extravagant, there were plenty of nobles and adventurers that sought out for them.

(There wouldn't be a point in speeding this up with the Fourth's Skill, would there…)

The Skill raised one's movement speed, but even if I tried doing that, the carriage has its own schedule to keep.

Even if I expedited it to arrive faster, if it was set to arrive exactly on time, I doubt it would be much appreciated.

(Though it's surely a good thing to have more Skills to use.)

With that on my mind, I closed my eyes once more.

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Having arrived at Imperial Capital Centralle, our party finally got through the intense bustle of people at the gate, and began heading out to find an inn.

It was my third time in the city, and I did not get lost.

Of course, we also had two who were raised here, Miranda and Shannon, with us this time.

A pale emerald green in color, Miranda's wavy hair extended long enough to touch her back.

She was an individual that gave off an impression like that of a cat, but even so, she was a Noble Lady.

She hailed from an imperial viscount family known as the Circry House.

Her younger sister Shannon was a little girl with dull violet hair, and amber colored pupils

She was the youngest one among all of us, but she was also quite a schemer who played the part of a poor ephemeral lass, robbed of her vision.

“Hey, someone carry this for me. Lyle, why aren’t you taking it? Aren’t you supposed to be a man?”

I turned to her, and spoke.

“I’m surprised you can say such a thing while looking at all the baggage in my hands. In the first place, you’re already having Monica carry your stuff, are you not?”

The ones carrying quite a load in their arms, were me and Monica.

With Monica carrying around Clara’s, Miranda’s and Shannon’s belongings, we attracted quite a few wandering eyes.

By the way, the ones I was carrying were Novem’s, and Aria’s.

“But this is quite heavy.”

What Shannon showed off with a cute voice was not a leather-made travel bag, but a small piece of hand luggage.

“Keep your sleep talk for when you’re asleep. Come back once you’ve become an actual Lady.”

I spat out my words in return, abandoned the girl and her jeers, and headed towards the inn.

The one who hit a noisy Shannon on the back of her head was Miranda-san.

She was the one among us with the most years being her, but that being the case, she was still only seventeen.

“Shannon, you can carry that much yourself. Even just with having Monica carry your luggage, it’s no good if you don’t feel the least bit thankful.”

Hearing that, while still keeping all the bags in hand, Monica puffed out her chest.

Her large bust swayed up and down.

“Please remember that I’m quite displeased with having to carry you lot’s belongings. They’re just add-ons to those of my precious chicken dickwad’s. You should all be more grateful.”

While there was a disparity of her treatment of me and those around, she was the type of person who did her work properly regardless of her toxicity.

Seeing that, a girl with deep blue hair, red eyes, and glasses spoke.

It was Clara.

“I’ve been to Centralle a number of times, but there sure are a lot of people. Unlike Arumsaas, perhaps I should call it more efficient…”

If you forced me to say, Centralle was a place that felt quite narrow.

Compared to the streets of Arumsaas, that were almost like a labyrinth themselves, it was several times more decent.

With her brown hair tied in a side ponytail, Novem looked at me with her violet eyes.

“Will we be staying at the same inn we used before, Lyle-sama?”

Novem Forxuz… my former fiancée, and the charming young lass who accompanied me when I had been driven out of my home.

There was a time when I thought that as long as I had Novem by my side, the rest didn’t really matter, but by the time I came to it, I found myself already surrounded by an army of females.

A mannish woman with red hair, Aria, spoke.

“We do have the money, so why not get a more-spacious one? I

don’t want to be squeezing three into a two person room like last time.”

The last time we came here, we had lodged with a man and two women in a two person room.

But it’s best to cut down on hotel expenses.

I mean, Centralle was also a place that cost quite a pretty penny.

“I approve of the proposal for personal rooms, but with these numbers, we can’t go about staying at too extravagant a place.”

Aria spoke.

“You, after taking in that large a sum, you sure are one to talk.”

I did end up making a bit of a fortune in Arumsaas, so unlike before, I did have a bit of leisure.

If you were to look at me as a single adventurer, I would likely be regarded as a success.

From inside the Jewel, the one well attuned to talks about money let out his voice.

With his glasses being his defining characteristic, the Fourth was quite a harsh person when it came to counting coins

『Hey, it’s not like you’re the one who earned it or anything! That’s something I gave Lyle instructions for… normally, he should have been able to sell the knowhow on Porter for much greater a sum…』

After constructing a golem to carry luggage inside a labyrinth, I had sold that knowledge to the academy of Arumsaas.

If you want to look at the pricing, then it’s something I’m quite satisfied with as an individual.

But the one who couldn’t come to terms with it at all was the Fourth.

(There are plenty more ways for us to make money…)

As I thought that, I felt that the Ancestors were sending some

dubious glances at me.

Aria drew closer to me, and there, Miranda-san raised her voice.

“It’s already gotten quite late today, but when tomorrow comes, I’ll introduce you guys to a place we’ll be able to stay a while. I think you already know what I’m talking about though, Lyle.”

Hearing that, I remembered.

“The Circry House’s mansion? No, it would certainly be nice if we could stay, but are you sure you’re alright with that?”

Both Miranda-san and Shannon were in a state where they had been kicked out of the Circry House.

On paper, it was stated they were sent to the City of Scholars to study, but in reality, it was nothing more than an opportunity to have them learn to be independent.

The reason I worried so much as to whether it was alright to return was likely because I had been driven out of my house as well.

Miranda-san spoke with a smile.

“It’s fine. I’ve already gotten father’s permission, and I properly notified them to make the preparations to receive a party of seven.”

That smile of hers did seem to conceal a trace of mischief, but I decided to nod, and leave it at that.

“Understood. Then tomorrow, I guess we’ll be heading off to the Circry House’s mansion.”

And Miranda spoke on.

“Look forward to it.”

Look forward to what? As I stood unable to comprehend, the Sixth called out to me.

『… This kinda seems like that, right? From the parents’ point of view, it’s the ‘Please give me your daughter’s hand!’ type scenario.』

The one who agreed with him was the Seventh Generation.

『Right. If it were me, then the moment my daughter bought an adventurer boy home, I'd promptly shoot him to death…』

The one saying such a scary thing was my grandfather.

It seems this and that happened in the past, and he came to hate the association known as the Adventurers' Guild, and the Adventurers that came with it.

I get the feeling he isn't really supportive of my current state as an adventurer either.

I thought to myself.

(Well, we have quite a lot of girls with us, so I don't think they'll misunderstand too much.)

With bags in hand, I held such a naïve thought in my mind, as I continued to search out an inn.

1 - The Circry House

We dropped by the Circry house.

Normally, one would be shocked upon seeing such a large mansion, but among us, only Clara and Monica gave such a reaction.

I was the heir to inherit the territory of a Feudal Lord.

Novem was the same.

Since it didn't have the space restrictions of this narrow capital, then if I had to say, Novem's mansion on the Forxuz's territory was the larger of the two.

Aria was a former Baron house… or at least, she hailed from a notable family, so she wasn't surprised.

Miranda-san and Shannon should be going through some nostalgic sentiment upon returning to their own home of origin.

Thinking that, I looked at the two, but…

"Yeah~ looks like it's become even more dubious than before."

Miranda-san gave a bitter smile, and Shannon made a detestable expression.

"Che! So they're still here. Just get married off somewhere already, dammit."

We passed through the gate, and arrived at the front door.

Likely because they were relatives, the House's response was swift, and we were let through the gate without even being asked what our business was.

But from within the mansion…

"Why are those two back!? Father, it's already been decided that the successor is to be my groom when they marry into the family,

right!?”

“Cut the crap! Onee-sama, your man’s just some lowly servant, is he not!? My sweetheart is much better off!”

I heard the contesting voices of two females.

Monica spoke.

“Well, how should I put this… as expected of the household of these two fine ladies. They have quite an extreme disposition.”

She gave a bright smile as she looked over Shannon and Miranda-san.

Clara was timidly looking over the mansion’s exterior, and she seemed quite restless.

“Coming to an estate as large as this… um, I only know about things like etiquette in theory, you know?”

Seeing her look to Novem for help, the Third let out his voice from the Jewel.

『Well, we’re with family here, so I don’t think she really needs to pay mind to is. I mean, they’re the ones that called us over to begin with. And wait, If anyone even tries to lay hands on Clara, they’ll be beaten black and blue… by Lyle.』

Oh, so you meant me! While I held such an impression, Aria spoke up.

Perhaps because they had been on good terms before, it seems she knew their current family head.

“As long as you’re making an attempt, I’ll bet Ralph-san will allow it to an extent. Just give a normal greeting, and keep quiet after that, and you should be just fine.”

To Aria, who said such a thing, Novem gave a worried tone.

“Aria-san, could it be that in regards to etiquette, you…”

Aria averted her eyes.

“Of course I learned it. But that was years, and years, and years ago! There are plenty of things I’m sure I’ve forgotten.”

While Aria seemed like she was about to burst into tears, Miranda-san made a smile, and spoke.

“I made sure to tell then I was bringing along my adventurer comrades, so you don’t have to worry about courtesy and the like. More importantly, Lyle?”

As Miranda-san looked at me, I nodded, and raised the small leather case in my hands.

The large sum paid for the mansion in Arumsaas, as well as the sum they had received as support up to now had been prepared.

“Are you sure I should be the one to hand it over?”

“Oh it’s fine. I’ll bet that’ll make it more interesting.”

Hearing her speak of something being interesting, I tilted my head, as I held the case in hand, and waited for the doors to open.

The disputing voices coming from within the mansion ceased, the doors opened, and what we found standing before us was a fine gentleman with grey hair.

He did display a bit of his own enervation, but I chose not to touch up on that point.

Putting his suit in order, the one staring at me, 【Ralph Circry】-san was Miranda-san’s, and Shannon’s father.

After losing his wife, it doesn’t seem he took in a second.

For that reason, it was a necessity for the four siblings of the Circry house to welcome in a groom sometime soon.

“My apologies. Well then welcome to… M-Miranda?”

“What is it father?”

Perhaps because the impression she gave off had changed considerably, Ralph-san looked over us with slight panic.

And the sight of Shannon standing normally as well…

“… Oy, why are you so docile all of a sudden?”

Seeing her bashfully fidgeting in a manner that didn’t suit her, I ended up voicing those thoughts.

“I-I mean, I’m seeing father for the first time in… ow!”

As Miranda-san’s clenched fist found its place on her, Ralph-san, and all those behind him went into a daze.

“The hell you doing!?”

“You can’t just keep putting up the frail act forever! You’re already going to be fine on your own, so you have to show off your reliable side.”

The siblings began getting noisy, so I addressed Ralph-san in their place.

“Um, I’m one in the same party as Miranda-san. My name is Lyle. Ah, this is a bit of a souvenir. ”

Sweets sold within the capital, hand-picked by Miranda-san, were handed over.

“Y-yeah, much obliged. The feel they gave off was much too different, that I ended up going into shock. But nothing will begin if we just keep making a racket at the entranceway. It seems the two of them get along as well as ever.”

To offer aid to Ralph-san’s distress, we set foot into the Circry Mansion.

I saw two ladies of marriageable age wearing dresses.

I believe the lass with her braided black hair set behind her head was【Doris Circry】.

She was wearing a navy dress, and had glasses hanging on her face.

Her drooping eyes were looking over our group with suspicion.

And the other one, wearing a yellow dress, and donning deep green hair was【Lucy Circry】.

Her long hair extended down her back, and the impression she gave off was reminiscent of Miranda's.

Their eyes fell on Miranda-san, and Shannon.

"For them to return after all this time…"

It was quite apparent that we weren't welcome, but anyways, Ralph-san spoke up.

"Doris, Lucy… you two don't need to tend to our guests. Please step back."

As he said that, the two of them continued to glare at us, as they receded to the deeper parts of the mansion.

Seeing them, the Fourth spoke.

『The worries of imperial court noble Ladies…』

The Fifth voiced his agreement.

『With their elder sister returning, they're likely beginning to worry about their own livelyhoods. In a different sense than that of a feudal lord, they're desperate to earn their keep.』

The Sixth spoke.

『Even with Milleia marrying into their family, do you think I would forgive such a petty squabble?』

The Seventh…

『That's all you can expect from court nobles. Quite a few of them were purged in my time, you know. Even when they are the ones who invited us over, good grief…』

He said some scary things.

(Come to think of it, I believe he said he acted as an advisor. I did hear it was quite a harsh time, though…)

It seems the Second couldn't keep up.

『Court nobles, is it… I've only ever met them when I succeeded my position. I met with the King, and swore loyalty, and… just for that, they had me wait for over ten days.』

The Fourth spoke.

『Yes, if they won't bring in any profit, it's best to keep them waiting. Then comes the bribes, right? If it was just ten days, you should have just forked it over.』

The Fifth was of the same opinion.

『Yes, that produces a far higher efficiency. Well, the unforgiving environment is a bit of a problem.』

The Second quietly…

『… Do I look like I had that sort of money?』

While thinking over how much trouble the man went through, I continued through the mansion. For some reason, it ended up we would be discussing matters with Ralph-san with just me and Miranda-san.

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I was sitting on the sofa drinking tea, but I couldn't taste it at all.

"… You mean to say that this isn't betrothal money? You're being serious, right?"

"Y-yes."

We sold the estate in Arumsaas, and returned all the fees it took for its uptake.

As I began to produce the money from the case, Miranda-san…

"So you're telling me that wasn't betrothal money?"

Said that.

From then on, barraged me with questions in an indifferent tone, and finally, it seemed the misunderstanding was about to be resolved.

The Second spoke.

『This girl is scary.』

The Sixth was…

『Oh come now, she was just desiring a little good clean fun!』

You can't discredit that as just a little! As I thought that, Miranda-san proposed a question to Ralph-san.

Unlike before, she was making a serious expression.

"And so, why have you finally decided to call us back?"

Before the daughter, who had changed considerably, Ralph-san kept sending fleeting glances in my direction, making the situation exceedingly awkward.

The Third spoke.

『Don't you think he's under the impression you ate up her daughter? See, there are plenty of girls who change when they get a man.』

The Fifth seemed fed up.

『And he pays such mind to an abandoned girl? Really, I wonder.』

Ralph-san let out a sigh, as he spoke.

"… Yes, it's true that we drove the two of you out of the house. I've of no mind to deny that. But at the same time, there was a reason."

Saying that, Ralph-san called my name.

"【Lyle Walt】… you're the former heir of the Walt House, correct? I ended up looking into the rumors surrounding you from Dalien and Arumsaas."

The voice I heard from within the Jewel was mingled with a little tension.

It was the Sixth.

『Hm… Imperial Noble, was it? I guess it isn't uncommon for a viscount to be well informed.』

So how does this man want to move in regards to me?

As I thought that, Miranda-san spoke to him.

"… Even if you're my father, if you lay hands on my comrades… especially Lyle, then I will get serious."

Even receiving his daughter's challenging glare, Ralph-san's expression didn't change.

No, more than that, he smiled a little.

"I never thought you would be one to say that. Be at ease. Our Circry house is one with ties to the Walt House. You and I both have their blood flowing through our veins. That was quite a while ago, though."

Miranda-san showed surprise upon hearing that, but I already knew, so I kept a poker face, and continued drinking my tea.

How awkward.

"What I'm mindful of is the fact that someone of the Walt House came to approach you and Shannon."

As I gave a reaction, Ralph-san's gaze came to be fixed on me.

"Lyle-kun, is it alright if I asked you something?"

"Please, go ahead."

"For what intent did your House make a move to have you approach Miranda and Shannon?"

In regards to the question posed to me, the Seventh offered some advice.

『Just give an honest answer, Lyle. He already has the information he needs. The fact that you were driven out of your home, and most of

what's transpired around you, he should have a general grasp of it.』

I tightened my grip on the Jewel once, and answered.

"My House is of no relation. Because I was kicked out."

Miranda-san spoke.

"Father, asking something like that when you already know is…"

Ralph-san let out a sigh.

"I know. But if I don't go about it like this, I won't be able to calm down. You met her a few years ago, right? That Celes Walt."

The name I heard the moment I put my cup down made me raise my face in surprise.

The Sixth spoke.

『Calm yourself, Lyle. 』

I tried to feign composure, but it seems he understood what I felt.

And he started going on about the reason Miranda-san and Shannon were thrown out.

"It started from that point. There was a proposal from the Walt House to take charge of your education. No, to be more precise, they developed quite an interest in you. They tacked on a reason, and tried to call you over."

In this sense, education was where nobles would send sons and daughters between each other to raise.

It's not that rare among relatives. In some cases, children were sent out to learn discipline.

The Fifth spoke.

『… Now isn't that strange? Why would the excuse of 'we'll train her up, so hand her over' ever pass?』

The Seventh spoke.

『In my time, there were plenty of Houses that requested training from the Walt House, but we didn't ever go as far as to try taking someone in ourselves.』

I asked about that.

"Did my family really say they would educate her?"

After taking a sip of tea, Ralph-san gave an answer.

"At present, the Imperial Capital's the same, but the Walt House's movements have been quite strange in particular. Since the time they drove out their own successor, you, there have been a lot of Houses cutting relations with them. Of course, that was also based on their actions from before that…"

It seems that from the time I began being confined to my room, the Walt House had become quite strange.

And Ralph-san went on.

"As a provincial Noble House, the Walts are known to be quite prodigious in the pen and the sword. Even I considered sending my daughter to such a place at some point… but then a letter came stating they would do it for us at once."

That unthinkable action made him give up on the act, or so he said.

But having heard Ralph-san's explanations, the Ancestors…

Second and up:

『Prodigious… so were my troubles finally rewarded?』
『I think the 'sword' part of it was definitely me! Me, who cleaned up after that big-headed bastard!』
『Then does that make me the 'pen'? That really was a lot of trouble.』
『Prodigious, huh. Well, those that survive are to be named as superior. That's just how the world turns. It's different now, though.』
『Yeah, that's right… it sure is different with the current gen.』
『I-it's not my fault! It's that stupid son of mine!』

After clearing my throat once, I asked.

“So because you didn’t want to send Miranda-san there for her education, you dispatched her to Arumsaas?”

Miranda-san sent a distrustful glance in her father’s direction.

“This is the first I’m hearing of it.”

With a serious expression, Ralph-san talked.

“… A few years ago, the young lass called Celes came to the Capital, and then it all started to feel strange. Requests that anyone would think of as unreasonable suddenly began to pass. While normally, one would try making some distance, there were even some Houses that purposefully started inching closer to the Walt House because of that too.”

If you can get away from a troublesome connection, it’s best you do. That’s a principle of nobility.

There are instances where escape is impossible, but generally, the reaction is to make some distance.

Ralph-san spoke.

“I’ve been working in the palace for quite some years, but even so, this is the first. Also, the moment Miranda and Shannon did leave the house, they seemed to lose all interest. After that, they stopped calling out to us altogether.”

Miranda-san spoke.

“… Well there does seem to be a little sense to it. And? What’s the reason you’ve called me over today? Isn’t it bad if me and Shannon are to stay here?”

From the current flow of the conversation, it’s bad for us to be here.

From the Imperial Capital… no, it would be best if we left the country with all due haste.

(When she… Celes comes into play, there’s nothing I’ll be able to accomplish.)

Twice.

I've experienced growth two times, but still, I can't even imagine winning over Celes.

I remembered that overwhelming difference in power.

Ralph-san's face turned tired.

Unlike the serious discussion that had transpired up to now, he started giving a simple explanation of the situation.

"…. Have you heard of Doris and Lucy's fight?"

Miranda scoffed.

"Marriage to someone too separated in status? Idiotic. One of them'll just have to give up."

Having already been separated from all of this, Ralph-san likely wouldn't accept having her marry in a successor at this point in time.

Having been cut off due to the Walt House's invitations, it doesn't look like she has any intentions of returning.

"You won't ask me or Shannon to come back, right?"

"Do you think doing that would suddenly get me a groom of equal status? I understand that isn't going to happen, and your lives are already your own… just do whatever you want with them. It's just that, if you're willing to hear out my honest opinion, Lyle-kun over there is a little…"

I heard the Third's voice.

『Lyle-kun's a little what!? Have at it, Lyle.』

He was laughing quite happily.

The Seventh shouted out.

『What problem do you have with our Lyle, you rat of the court!!』

(Grandfather, please calm down.)

While I thought something like that, Ralph-san spoke.

“Well he does look like an earnest lad, but, well… won’t it be hard to support that many women as an adventurer? It may be the dream of all men, but for me to have my daughter taken by a man who’s seriously trying to build himself a harem in this day and age is…”

Yep, I agree wholeheartedly.

The Seventh spoke.

『… Right. That’s definitely how the current Lyle looks』

The Second spoke.

『I’ll bet he can at least support them. For better or worse, he has some talent.』

The ‘for better or worse’ part seemed to stab into me.

“It’s up to me who I’m to choose, right? Won’t you get to the main point already? Are you trying to tell me to stop those two idiot sisters of mine?”

Ralph-san muttered something mournful along the lines of, ‘she was so much cuter before…’ as he looked at Miranda-san.

I get the feeling the gaze he directed at me grew sharper.

“No, I do have the sentiment to get them to give up, but something else has come up.”

Ralph-san explained.

“There was a knight who forcefully intruded on our house for work-related matters. It seems those two ended up hearing his words. A brigade of knights is to be dispatched to Johnny Village, a village under direct imperial control. Their numbers were insufficient, so it’s been decided they’ll take volunteers for the expedition. This all happened before the official announcement.”

Apparently, it seems a【Hippogryph】had taken up residence near Johnny Village.

A monster with the head and front claws of an eagle, with the body and back hooves of a horse stuck on the back.

The fact it could fly through the air made it quite a troublesome monster.

Additionally, it seems that even the surrounding monsters had begun to gather around it.

A question surfaced in my mind, so I decided to ask.

“Wasn’t the imperial capital stuck with more than enough knights and soldiers?”

It’s the capital, that’s hell for adventurers to live in.

In this place, most matters are reliably handled by such official forces.

Ralph-san spoke.

“The Hippogryph is one thing, but recently, we’ve been sending out one knight troop after another. They’re short on numbers. The one leading this time’s dispatch is just going to be a decurio.”

Decurio. In military terms, their role would be to get a party of ten or so knights together. Based on the scope of the battle, their force could be used for simple aid.

But thinking about the opponent this time, I do get the feeling it’s a little insufficient.

The Sixth spoke.

『… It may be that.』

The Fifth appeared to agree.

『Cutting down on numbers? In the current capital? I did hear they were short on hands, but… no, it’s knights they’re short on.』

While the Fifth continued to prattle on, the Second suddenly spat out some angry words.

『Hah! In the end, to those imperials up there, that’s all a small village is worth to them.』

While I wondered what exactly he was trying to say, Ralph-san spoke.

“The ones those two desire to marry volunteered at once upon hearing the story. No, perhaps I should say they were made to volunteer? Regardless, it isn’t something that can be taken back so easily. If possible, I’d like you to protect the two men helplessly dragged into this.”

That was the request Ralph-san asked of us.

Miranda-san spoke.

“Protect them? They’re going out to defeat monsters, right?”

I also thought it strange.

While they may be in a situation they can no longer escape from, is there a really a need to provide help? From Ralph-san’s position, it should be better if they didn’t exist.

(Ah, when I think of it like that, I get the feeling my mind’s become a little darker.)

“… The servant【Breid】really does good work.【Marcus】is a young man who cares deeply for his family. They’re both youths I would find a pity to die by the selfish whims of those two girls.”

Miranda-san spoke.

“You’re speaking as if it’s certain they’ll fail!”

Ralph-san spoke.

“Yeah, that’s why all you have to do is make them scamper back home. Would you, by chance, take up my request… Lyle-kun? If it’s up to one hundred gold coins, I’m willing to prepare it. If possible, I’d like to leave my daughters out of it.”

Ralph-san wasn’t looking at Miranda-san, but at me.

Miranda-san spoke.

“A request to Lyle… What’s more, you want me and Shannon to stay

behind?”

The Fourth spoke.

『Leave my daughter behind. That sort of thing? This is quite a dangerous request, isn’t it?』

… Seeing his testing gaze, I began to wonder whether he was concealing something. I couldn’t just go along with it so easily.

The Second spoke.

『I don’t like this man at all. It’s as if he’s saying he doesn’t care if some small village out there gets crushed. I can’t put up with it anymore. It’s all just really irritating.』

Having been the lord of such a small village, it appears the Second had much to think.

And the Third spoke.

『And so you’re going to abandon them as well? If you’re fine with that, we’ll try telling Lyle to refuse as well, though…』

The Second…

『Dammit! Lyle, you decide by yourself!』

He seemed quite pained, and it seems he did want me to take it up.

A single small village was going to be destroyed.

Hearing such a story. Ralph-san’s testing eyes…

I spoke.

“… I’ll accept it. But Miranda-san and Shannon are both my comrades, and members of my party, so I’m going to be taking them along.”

I decided to take up the request.

2 - Someone to Guard

Walking down the narrow alleyway, I confirmed the contents of the memo again.

“So it’s here.”

It should have been a bright day, but the towering buildings intercepted the light of the sun, basking everything in a gloomy feel.

The note Ralph-san had handed me had the name【Marcus Carning】written on it.

The man the third daughter of the Circry House had taken a liking to, and was scheming to get married into the House.

Of course, the very premise of that plan was already flawed.

“Trying to rack him up some achievements to raise his status, and forcefully finding him employment for that sake… yes, it doesn’t settle right with me, but…”

The Johnny Village dispatch was already anticipated to have a level of casualties, and another one of its objectives was to cut down on the number of low ranking nobles, who’d immediately jump at the chance offered by such a volunteer opportunity.

Even if they’re still nobles, those of the knight class did have it quite rough.

Those without any peerage only had the annuity to give their families a humble life.

It would be different if they had work, but in Centralle’s current state, such work is quite a scramble.

From within the Jewel, I heard a complaint.

It was the Second.

『Even if the dispatch falls through, they’ll just send out their real

force to resolve it safely, is it? I'll bet they plan to raise up the next ones they're going to send.』

I looked around, and confirmed I was alone.

I opened my mouth.

"But won't having the army face defeat create various problems…"

The one to answer was the Sixth.

『There are various cases. Factional disputes, and competitions for posts, and then, there's all the poor saps dragged into it all.』

I wonder if it really is true that there were too many Nobles.

The main problem would be that there hadn't been a large war in the past few decades or so.

The Seventh spoke.

『Bahnseim has grown much too big. But Lyle… even for a country as large as that, there's still a set amount of its populace it can support. Nobles are the same. The amount they can employ is definite.』

While it may be definite, if there are some achievements to be had, then the knights receive promotions, or some form of reward must be bestowed unto them.

The Second spoke.

『Then just go reclaim more land already! Just look at the damn slums… with those numbers, a village or two'd be raised and prosper in a jiffy!』

On the way here, I had a chance to catch sight of the Imperial Capital's slums.

They were overflowing with people, and on the way, I was even begged at a few times.

The Fourth spoke.

『Beasts and bandits… and monsters… for a small village, the chances it'll be destroyed is quite high. The investors in such an endeavor would also hesitate.』

Using magic, one could definitely finish up a village at quite a fast rate, but after that, it was the maintenance that grew difficult.

And having magicians constantly stationed at such an outpost cost money.

Those feasible to dispatch to develop villages were magicians specialized in earth and water attributes.

Using that, it would be easy to build the foundation, but…

(Just like with this time, it'll be wiped out the moment a strong monster shows up.)

And that's why knight brigades are sent out, and adventurers and mercenaries can put meals on the table.

I sighed, looked over the number and nameplate on the door, and knocked.

"Yes~."

The one who opened the door with a slackish tone was a delinquent-esque young man with his short orange-colored hair ruffled into quite a mess.

I could not see him as the earnest man described.

He stared at me with his drooping eyes, as he waited for me to state my business.

His height was tall, and his facial features were well in order, though mildly sinister…

"Are you Marcus-san?"

He scratched his head.

"That's right? What business you got with… do you have with me?"

Seeing my attire, he likely thought of me as a rich brat.

He seemed to mind his tone of voice.

I had been taken care of by the Circry House, and I couldn't be wearing something too rough when I stopped by, so I came to the apartment in some relatively decent clothing.

"I am an adventurer. Well, it's the Circry House that made a request to me, though."

As I said that, Marcus spoke up.

"… What? If it's about the volunteer soldier thing, I ain't gonna take it up. I'm just trying to raise my rank a bit, and get a steady income here. Not that that old man'd ever understand the feels of the bottom rung."

Old man likely referred to Ralph-san.

The Third spouted out something quite irrelevant.

『… Sheltered daughters, and nobles and the like, you hear. They always seem to fall for these sorts of delinquent-ish men.』

Rank… for a court knight, a single rise in position could greatly alter one's annuity.

The provisions paid to them every year were a precious source of income.

The Fourth spoke.

『Well, if he's at least trying to find work, he's got some ambition.』

The Fifth agreed.

『If I had to say, then I don't think he should pay any mind to honor, and just take up some jobs aside from those given by the royal palace.』

While I wasn't too familiar with the circumstances surrounding that area, I spoke to Marcus.

“I did accept a request pertaining to the volunteer work, but with how it’s been phrased, it looks like I’ll mainly be serving as your subordinate.”

“Subordinate? What do you mean?”

He bit the bait, and I handed over a letter.

It was one written up by Ralph-san.

What it described were the specifics of the request I had taken up as an adventurer.

Marcus-san’s face curled into a smile.

“So he does know his stuff, that viscount! With this, even if I don’t participate much myself, I’ll still stand out!”

Seeing his happy face, I covered up my emotions with a bitter smile.

I don’t really get it, but if he didn’t have the personnel, couldn’t he have just hired them?

Besides using his daughter as an intermediary, I think there were plenty of ways to go about it.

There, the Seventh spoke.

『Hmm, it seems this time’s request from that damn rat may prove to be for Lyle’s sake as well.』

The Fifth approved.

『The haves, and the have nots? Well, in this case, it’s a bit off. It’s certainly something essential to the current Lyle, no doubt.』

While I started to think over what it was I was lacking, my shoulder was hit roughly a few times.

“What’s that? So you’re coming with a party of seven? With this, we can even work on the scope of a platoon. It’s more than welcome!”

The letter did have some details about me, and it served as a letter of introduction.

The departure was in five days, so preparations were going to get hectic.

“Um, that hurts.”

“Oh, sorry ‘bout that. So, did you just come to give a greeting today?”

“No, I thought I’d ask what your plans were for tomorrow. I’d like if you took your equipment, and came to the Circry Mansion when you’re available. There’re various things we’ll have to confirm.”

Marcus-san made a questioning expression.

“The mansion? Then that means that bastard, Breid’ll, be there…”

The one Marcus-san spoke of,【Breid Vamper】was a servant of the Circry House, or how should I put it, he mainly used his strength to do jobs requiring brute force.

His father had a single generation’s worth of knight peerage behind him, but on top of not being able to succeed that, Breid was born as the third son, so he ended up finding work as a servant.

I tried asking.

“Do you dislike him?”

Marcus-san nodded.

“He always kinda picks a fight with me, or maybe he’s jealous? I mean, I’m a bonafide hereditary noble, so he’s got this and that to think about.”

I had also met with Breid already, but I didn’t really have a conversation.

(… Though I don’t really think there’s that much a need to fuss over who’s a noble, and who’s not.)

“So that means it’s that, right? Breid’s going to be participating a well?”

I nodded.

“Yes, or so I’ve heard. And so, I thought it best we all met up.”

In truth, if I don’t get a grasp of their skill as soon as possible, this expedition will be exceedingly risky.

If I want to ensure their safety as best as possible, I should promptly put an end to these matters.

“I got it. I’m not in a standing to complain anyways. Aand, your name is…”

“It’s Lyle.”

I didn’t give my last.

“I see. Pleasure working with ya’.”

While his appearance was a little deviant, he was a surprisingly amiable man.

❼

… The Circry House manor.

Miranda was walking down the corridor with ill humor.

“That rotten father of mine…”

The cause of it was her father.

That tone of his, as if to test Lyle, had been oh so irritating.

Walking beside her, Shannon was quite dejected.

“So why am I participating as well? I want to relax around my own home for once.”

Miranda spoke.

“Then we’ll leave you here alone, so you can take the brunt of those two’s cynicism. They may even resort to physical means at this point.”

While she said that as a threat, she knew the probability of such a thing wasn't low.

That her younger sisters didn't welcome their siblings who had finally returned home.

"I don't want either. Isn't there a more elegant life somewhere out there for me?"

Miranda sighed, and looked out one of the windows lining the hallway.

There, Doris was talking with a tall, black-haired man.

The earnest-looking youth was【Breid Vamper】.

He had come to the mansion just after they left, and he was a third born son, who wasn't even a noble.

He could read, write, and do calculations, as well as handle a sword to an extent, and he was currently doing live-in work at the mansion.

"What's wrong? Ah, Doris-oneesama, is it? It sure is rare to see her out of her room."

The reason Shannon laughed, as if to make fun of her, was one Miranda agreed with. She agreed, but…

(I don't remember you ever leaving your room either.)

"Right, she's moving in a good direction."

And after the two had separated, Shannon looked over the scene, and spoke.

"… That man is somehow using Doris-oneesama. He isn't really putting much feeling into it, at least, I can't see the two of them as lovers."

Miranda also felt that.

Perhaps noticing the two stares from the window, Breid smiled, and gave a light nod, before departing.

He was tall, and his face wasn't bad.

But Miranda had noticed.

"That face is one of a man with high ambitions. Perhaps the reason he approached Doris was to gain status as a noble."

Shannon spoke.

"Well, he seems somewhat capable, but his abilities are below Lyle's… perhaps it'll be impossible for him to rack up achievements?"

Miranda sighed.

"Don't compare to Lyle. They're in different dimensions."

He could manage swords and magic, use multiple Skills at the same time, and reached the level of a mid-class adventurer in well under a year.

The levels of talent were far too different.

It made her want to tilt her head at the Walt House that thought to drive him out, but the very fact that Celes was there was enough for her to accept it.

(Good grief… knowing full well, he spoke as if to challenge him.)

Knowing about Lyle's circumstances, the reason Ralph gave the request this time around was something Miranda learned later.

Ralph wanted to confirm just how Lyle planned to move.

It was true that he had been looking into him, and he knew that Lyle was skilled as an adventurer.

Because of that, Miranda had been in quite a foul mood since morning.

(There are no absolutes in the world. And yet for him to give out a meaninglessly dangerous request…)

She had much she wanted to say, but as she didn't have the time,

Miranda hurried with her preparations…

❼

… Monica was modifying Porter in the back yard of the mansion.

The one looking over her work was Clara.

Clara had been unable to adjust to the atmosphere of the estate, so she conversed with the automaton outside.

“Can we put Porter to use outside? I don’t think it will output too much speed.”

On Clara’s question, Monica spoke.

“You mean to say the fruit of mine and the chicken dickhead’s love falls short of those horse drawn carriages scattered over the place? It’s not like we’re all getting a horse, so we’ll be going on foot. With that, Porter will give some peace of mind. We can load supplies onto it, and more than anything, just look at this damn fine armor!”

Banging her fist against Porter’s bulk, Monica went on.

“There’s no need to fear the fangs and claws of monsters! What’s more, it won’t even shake on uneven roads!”

Seeing Monica brag so highly about Porter, Clara began clapping her hands.

“Yes, if we’ll be mainly travelling on foot, then Porter will have a large part to play. And coupled carriages can’t be used if the roads aren’t well-maintained.”

Hearing Clara’s words, Monica nodded, before tilting her head.

“More importantly, Clara-san, there’s something I’ve yet to understand.”

“What is it?”

“Shouldn’t knights and soldiers have been sent out beforehand when

they heard a village was attacked? Despite that, they sure are taking their time, aren't they? Won't there be heavy casualties?"

Monica found it strange that they'd yet to send a defensive force, when there could be casualties popping up at this very minute.

Clara took off her glasses, and gave a preface of, 'well I'm none too knowledgeable' before speaking on.

"… It's quite a small settlement, so they probably consider it a low level of priority. I don't enjoy putting it like this, but even if the village is lost, it won't be a serious wound on the Imperial Capital at all."

Hearing that, Monica spoke.

"This sure is a harsh world on the weak."

She resumed her work on Porter. In essence, she needed to finish it up within a span of four days, so she hurriedly proceeded with her modifications.

It wasn't possible to accomplish much at night, so she had to use her limited time to pass by as planned.

Otherwise the complaints would come in.

Clara whispered, 'ah,' and Monica stopped her hands.

"What is it?"

The one walking up to them in long strides was one with her long straight verdure hair swinging back and forth: Lucy.

She was followed by some servants of the mansion.

"What is it? Don't give me that! Whose mansion do you think you're making such a racket in. The creaks and bangs are getting unbearable!"

Clara stood from her sitting posture, and seeing that, Lucy spoke.

"I wondered what sort of person he was when he brought along a maid, but it was just an abandoned kid of the Walt House, and his adventurer friends… how appropriate."

Monica spoke.

“I see. Well that’s nice. It’s just that I’ve already received the permission of the family head Ralph-sama to carry out work here. You asked whose mansion it was? Well, that would be Ralph-sama, right…? So what did you come here for?”

Clara hurriedly tried to put a stop to Monica, but in essence, Monica was Lyle’s personal maid-type automaton.

She had lost her country, and her manufacturer had perished.

Meaning she herself was her own rule.

“Can’t you tell that I’m saying you’re annoying!?”

She scoffed at Lucy’s words.

“’And so?’ is the response I offer to that. I have the license to do so, and more importantly, your boyfriend, Marcus-san, was it? It will be for that man’s sake, so I’d appreciate it if you didn’t pull me down.”

Saying she wouldn’t make it on time, Monica restarted her work.

Hearing Marcus’s name brought up, Lucy took along the servants, and left.

Clara spoke.

“Was that alright? She’s a Lady of the Circry House, right?”

Scoffing again, Monica responded.

“And whose fault do you think it is we’re in this situation? I’d like it if she was at least a little compliant. If she goes as far as to even get in our way, it’ll be nothing but a nuisance.”

Sitting back down, Clara spoke.

“I’ve been thinking it for a while, but your attitude to everyone besides Lyle-san is quite cold.”

Monica gave her reply as if it were only natural.

“Yes, is there a problem with that?”

“… No, it’s nothing.”

Clara took out a book to read, and Monica continued with her work…

3 - Monetary Support

Borrowing the Circry House's yard, I checked over everyone's equipment.

Generally, adventurers were lightly equipped.

With that being the case, the Second gave his impression looking over all of us.

『… Uwah, how unreliable.』

The Third laughed as he spoke.

『It's at a level where I'd turn around and go home.』

As a gathering of adventurers, we weren't bad.

Our equipment was well in order, and if you looked at us as mercenaries, while we had our insufficiencies, we were capable of battle.

… Besides Monica.

"Monica, that maid outfit… just take off the dress already."

Fed up, I put one hand to my face. Monica gave an immediate reply.

"Don't want to! Rejected! Denied!"

She made a firm stance of denial, but I did know that her attire wouldn't be a hindrance to battle.

Its appearance was no good for the battlefield.

"Well then Monica will just be shoved into Porter, and the next problem is…"

The ones I turned my eyes to were Marcus-san and Breid-san.

Marcus-san was armed with his personal chainmail and sword.

He also had a spear on him, and that wasn't a problem, but the issue lied with Breid-san.

"I'm sorry. I wasn't able to borrow the armaments from my home."

In regards to Breid-san's apologetic manner, the Fourth spoke.

『I'll bet. It's unthinkable for them to lend out their precious equipment to a third son. Not even if he paid them for it.』

The Fifth spoke.

『You can find horrid treatments of seconds and thirds wherever you go.』

I thought.

(No, rather than first or second son, the Fifth Generation…)

The Fifth, who had over thirty children.

He did have his reasons, but to put it bluntly, he wasn't in a standing where he could interfere with this problem.

The Second likely thought as such as well.

『No, I doubt you're one to speak in this matter.』

The Fifth seemed displeased.

『As I thought.』

I thought, as I looked over everyone.

(We'll have to do something about our appearance. Since we're in the capital, it won't be hard to get equipment together, so perhaps we should purchase with an emphasis on appearances?)

Appearance itself was a single important factor.

Even if the contents were all the same, to one who looked the part, and one who didn't… if one were to choose, they would overwhelmingly veer towards the former.

"Today included, there are four days until our departure. We should

ready our equipment first.”

As I said that, the ones standing close and watching, Doris-san and Lucy-san spoke to their respective boyfriends.

“T-then I’ll purchase Breid’s weapons. I’ll pay any sum, be it ten or twenty gold.”

“E-even I can do at least that much…”

As Lucy-san said that, Doris-san chuckled to herself.

“It’s because you’re always wasting money that you don’t even have that much money, is it not?”

Lucy-san’s face turned red, as she raised a loud voice.

“I’ll borrow it from father! If it’s for Marcus’s sake, then whether it be fifty or one hundred gold coins, I’ll show you I can pay it!”

Listening in on that petty squabble, the individuals themselves were making doubtful expressions.

Marcus-san spoke.

“Lucy, while I do appreciate it, if you pay out that much money, I’ve nothing to give in return. My equipment’s already in order, and I do maintain it regularly, so there’s no problem.”

Seeing Marcus-san let out a sigh, Breid-san whispered to himself.

“… Well you sure have it easy, hereditary knight.”

He did say it loud enough for all to hear, so Marcus-san clicked his tongue.

I thought.

(They really don’t get along… and wait, the ancestors did stop me from putting out the money myself, but I can at least lend some out.)

My ancestors had halted me from providing the monetary support.

Don’t even think about it. If you’re going to do it, then put interest on the loans.

(I do have the financial leisure to put out fifty gold per, though.)

There's the sum I earned from selling Porter's info, so there was some space in my budget.

I spoke to the two of them.

"I can put some down from my side, so if there's a need to borrow some, don't hesitate to come to me. I'll bet Ralph-san will be willing to act as the guarantor for the two of you."

Hearing that, Marcus-san drew close to me.

"Really!? Then I'd like to leave a little to you! The equipment maintenance took more than I expected, and this month is looking rough."

Breid-san was the same.

"I'll definitely pay you back with the reward from this time's expedition! At the very least, I have to get some chain mail and a weapon together, or…"

Both of them seemed quite desperate, and I ended up giving a wry smile.

❼

『Listen here, Lyle. Humans can easily go amiss. When it comes to money, it become so much easier.』

Within the Jewel.

The Third explained to me.

When I was called into it, I found myself surrounded by lecturing ancestors.

"Y-yes."

Seeing my failure to comprehend, the Fifth spoke.

『Lyle, let's say you're left without money, and are in quite a pinch. In

that case, what would you do?』

I gave an immediate response.

“Eh? Then you just have to earn some, right? In the first place, I think you should be working so that it never comes down to that. I mean, right now, I’m working as an adventurer.”

Perhaps I would have been troubled before, but right now, I have confidence I could survive in the outside world.

Even if the party broke up, if I had Novem with me… no, I even had the confidence I could support a family.

The Sixth spoke.

『You lost your money and equipment, and your stomach’s empty. What do you do?』

I answered.

“Choose a request that doesn’t take too much time, and get a meal, I suppose?”

The Seventh asked.

『Then let’s say your stomach’s empty, and you have no equipment. Someone suggests to you to take up a high-paying request. Lyle, what would you do?』

That’s also an easy one.

“I wouldn’t take it. In that state, I would be scared to fail such a high paying request.”

There, the Fourth spoke.

『There’s a saying that goes, ‘poverty dulls the wit.’ Well, if it’s you, Lyle, you’d probably take action before it comes down to it, and you do have the skill to make up for it.』

The Third Spoke.

『There’s also the case where you can’t move from an injury. Losing

your limbs, and not being able to work even if you want to. 』

As I stood confused, the Second reminded me of Doris-san's, and Lucy-san's boyfriends.

『When you said you would lend money, those two seemed all too excited, didn't they? Even just to get equipment in order, it would be a hefty sum for the two of them. They would never be able to accomplish that so easily.』

I tilted my head.

"So why don't they just find work?"

If you want the opinion of one who had earned a considerable amount as an adventurer, going out, and taking on some weak monsters would make much more.

In a week to a month, wouldn't they be able to earn quite a bit? That's what I thought.

The Seventh went on in a tired tone. He likely wasn't addressing me, but the imperial nobles and knights.

『They have their face to keep. They can't go out to play as adventurers, and in the first place, the area around the imperial capital is patrolled by ones officially appointed to the role. They'd be sent back for being an obstruction to those guys' work. All that's left is seasonal work, and true odd jobs. What's more those pay little.』

The Third informed me.

『My era was the same, you know. The capital was a megalopolis, but it's not like they had much money to spare. Food was the same. It's not a given that you'll always be able to purchase it with money.』

Bandits, monsters, poor crops, natural disaster… there are various reasons, but anyways, there were times when one couldn't lay hands on food. At such times, the need to buy it from surrounding lords arise.

The Second spoke.

『Lyle, don't think everyone's the same as you. Without thinking of the consequences, there will surely be some who'll attack you just because you look like you have money.』

The Fourth was also serious.

『Make sure you're firm with monetary exchanges. There were lots of times when I had to give out rewards, and when you end up in that position, it's easy to understand. If you're not reliable in such fields, it will affect your credibility.』

Finally, the Third brought it all together.

『If you're wondering what we're trying to say… well, frivolous charity will never be for your sake.』

I nodded, and thought.

(Is it really something that hard? You work to get money, and you use it to live… isn't that all?)

I thought I had understood it in my head, but it's questionable whether I truly understood it or not.

❼

Dropping by a store frequented by adventurers in the capital, I looked at the price tag, and was pretty sure my face was making quite a dubious expression.

I didn't come to shop at the place I had visited before.

I thought that even if the price was high, I would be able to find a nice selection.

But when it came down to it, there were plenty of items with excess ornaments, but little with actual functionality.

The Third spoke.

『Is this place really popular among adventurers? Perhaps they usually dress themselves up in such ornate equipment, and make

use of their actual weapons during work.』

It's true that appearances are important, but there's no meaning in owning a weapon for the sole purpose of wearing around the city.

I looked at the armors meant for men, and heard the adventurers looking over the same selection gossiping amongst themselves.

"Oy, did you hear about this time's campaign at Johnny Village?"
"It's going to be that decurio Norma's squadron, right? I feel sorry for the ones selected to go."
"If they just put up a little money, it'll be resolved in an instant."
"But it's just a small village right? Even so, it just had to be Norma, didn't it."

Perhaps the party of two both knew the situation, as they talked as they selected out equipment.

"Female knights aren't all too rare, but yeah, that Norma…"

(Is there a problem with the person commanding it?)

As I said that, one of the adventurers spoke.

"She must be desperate to get a promotion. They did say her rank was going to drop because her parents died or something. Well, I wonder just how long she's going to be keeping up with that resentful means of operation."

There's no doubt she's going to be a troublesome individual.

As I thought that, Novem came over to me.

"Lyle-sama, how is it going on your side?"

She seems to have purchased something, as there was a parcel in her hand.

"It really is expensive. I wasn't thinking about it back then, but now I understand the reasons some adventurers go out to far places to buy equipment before returning to their home guilds."

There was barely any work in the capital.

The adventurers here were all either employed en masse by some noble, or were famous enough that they didn't have to be so troubled in finding work.

Besides that, there were only people like us, who stopped by on route elsewhere.

If a war broke out, large numbers of them gather from surrounding lands, apparently.

What Novem and Aria had bought were hoods with robes attached. They were coated in fur, so they were likely for use against the cold.

"Lyle-sama, you should also buy some cold-resistant gear."

Novem seemed earnestly worried, so I scratched my head.

"I guess that's what I'll do. Even so, a campaign in winter… we'll have to properly manage heating as well."

From within the Jewel, the voice I heard belonged to the Second.

『… Lyle, don't just purchase your own share. Bring along far more than you think necessary. If the leader turns out to be incompetent, you won't even be able to laugh at it later.』

The Third was the same.

『It doesn't really matter if they're man or woman, if the one on top's a failure, it sure is a pain. It's best you assume they don't have the necessary items prepared.』

This time's commander was a decurio from the Imperial knight brigades.

While her standing was one suited to bring together knights with their own soldiers like Marcus-san, they generally had a higher power commanding them, so it wasn't certain the number of troops they could lead.

There are times like this one, that volunteer forces are enlisted, but also times they'd lead soldiers of the state.

Perhaps this is to be the first time I'm to take action under another.

Up to now, as the party's leader, I had been the one giving out various orders.

(So I'm to be ordered around this time. Normally, the ones on that side are overwhelmingly more numerous.)

❼

The back yard of the Circry House.

Clara was moving around Monica's new and improved Porter.

The reason work finished ahead of schedule was because Monica herself had learned to optimize the process for efficiency, or so she said.

Seeing Monica brimming with such pride, Clara had no idea what to say.

"I'll try making it move, alright?"

Even if it was a modification, it was simply an increase in the scope of the shield's movement for outdoor use.

The shield deployed on Porter was spread overhead to create a simple roof.

Monica spoke.

"Porter… you're somewhat starting to resemble an RV. Even when I was aiming for an armored van."

She seemed to be unable to accept it, but from Clara's point of view, the ability to prepare a roof was quite a wonderful thing.

With just that, one could avoid the elements when operating outdoors.

"I do think it's plainly amazing, though."

There was a contraption to lock the moving shield in place.

Seeing that workmanship of hers, Clara confirmed that the

automaton held skills equal to, or exceeding the average mechanic.

“Monica-san, what do you plan to do now?”

After moving it around, and finding no problems to report, Clara confirmed Monica’s later plans.

“I’ll go out shopping. The Circry house is preparing some supplies for us, but as I thought, even outside, I should be striving to make the best meals I can for that chicken dickwad of mine.”

In Arumsaas, the usage of Porter was known among the adventurers, but this would be its first application in Centralle.

Rather than that, the party had never even thought they would be getting work in the capital.

They hadn’t submitted the form to change their home guild, and as a request from an acquaintance, they were participating in a volunteer legion as Marcus’s subordinate soldiers.

“Is sure is a pain. Well, I’ll do my best so as not to get in that goddamn chicken’s way.”

“I think that’s good enough.”

Feeling relieved, Clara returned Porter’s shield to its original position.

Once they’d loaded the luggage onto it before departure, their work would be over…

❼

Within the proceeding preparations.

I took Aria along to do some shopping.

Unlike me, with my unfamiliarity with the land, Aria was capital born and raised.

Novem and the others were taking care of various arrangements at

the mansion.

Stopping by the marketplace, we began to search for food stock that would do well preserved.

“Um~, Monica’s request was…”

I looked at the menu, as I searched for the items listed on it.

Both of us were carrying bags, and we purchased whatever we thought essential for the voyage.

Aria was making a slightly tired face.

“Wait, do we really need that? Based on our schedule, they have plenty enough food secured for our movement and rest, right? Why do we have to prepare our own share of provisions?”

I took the memo back from Aria in one hand, and spoke as I looked over the goods displayed around the market.

“There’s a lot to consider when participating in a voluntary corp. what’s been ensured is the share of the knights and soldiers. The volunteers’ portion is like a side priority, I hear.”

“You hear… make sure you check properly.”

Aria criticized me, but I responded.

“Rather than possibly bearing through insufficient supplies, it’s best we gather something up ourselves. I had Ralph-san help confirm the contents, but this time’s expeditions truly is horrendous.”

The funds backing it were such as well, but there were too many volunteers.

There were other adventurers hired by low ranking knights, and other adventurers that just went in and volunteered themselves.

But a majority of them were noble second and third sons who wouldn’t be succeeding their houses.

Rack up merits, and become a knight… everyone had such dreams in mind.

(From the start, there was no problem if casualties surface… is that really alright?)

As I thought over that question, I found Aria's eyes concentrated on the fruit section.

It was an item not on our shopping list.

I handed the lady shopkeeper a large copper coin, and bought one for her.

"You sure you don't want change? With this, you can buy…"

The shopkeeper said as such, so I took a few more fruits in hand, and handed them over to Aria.

"H-hey!"

"Yeah, don't worry about it… more importantly, aunty?"

I pushed Aria aside, and addressed the shopkeeper.

"What could it be? Oh my, aren't you quite a well-bred young man. Could it be you're a noble?"

"Nope. Anyways, I've stopped by the capital a few times, you see, and there's something I want to know. I heard about it quite recently, but the knights are going on an expedition? To Johnny Village, I heard? "

Perhaps the shopkeeper understood, as she put away the large copper coin, and started informing me with a smile.

"I heard it would be the female knight Norma leading it, but the rumors about her aren't the best. If you're thinking of joining in, I think it best you put a stop to it."

Thinking of me as an adventurer seeking for information, she tried to stop me, by informing me of the bad rumors.

"Is there anyone knowledgeable on the matter?"

"Not among my acquaintances, at least. It's just that I heard she was a knight who did quite some unreasonable things to attempt to get a

promotion. It’s best you don’t get involved.”

I gave my thanks, and left the area.

Aria walked alongside me as she asked.

“Couldn’t you have just asked Miranda? Was there really a need to do something like that?”

Her right hand held the parcels we bought, and her left, the fruit I bought for her.

“I wonder?”

“I wonder!? Explain it clearly.”

Aria was surprised by my answer. I started searching for the items we had yet to buy on the list.

“No, I just thought it would be nice if he heard some different rumors as well. I mean, the more I ask, the more I get the impression she’s just a demon out for a promotion.”

I wanted to know what sort of person she was, but based on the information I had in hand, she wasn’t one all too favored around here.

A young female knight in her early twenties, and overflowing with talent.

Up to there was fine, but the problem was that she did quite a bit of unreasonable stuff to raise her rank.

It wasn’t just herself. There were numerous accounts where she brought similar trouble to her surroundings.

(Is she one that isn’t pained by loss? The Imperial Capital really is thick.)

Looking up to the sky, I held such thoughts.

Aria spoke.

“… There isn’t much time before the expedition, but is it really fine

like this?”

I muttered.

“So there’s only two days left.”

4 - Preparations

From the start, there was little time to prepare.

On top of that, the village facing the monsters attack had been facing damages for quite a while.

A knight crusade to eliminate monsters.

Having received a request to participate as a volunteer, I was called for a conference with the six ancestors.

Just how did I plan on surviving through this? And how am I to protect my targets?

We were thinking over those two points.

As I barely had any experience as an adventurer, it was also the first time I'd taken up this sort of request.

I mean, the fact that I'm not in a leadership position is going to make things somewhat troublesome.

Taking on a mediator position, the Fourth put down all the information we had so far on a blackboard.

『The knight's departure is set for tomorrow. Let's just say that we've gotten together enough equipment for the two you're supposed to be guarding, now the problem is our own provisions. You haven't put together your arms or armor at all. Even if you have some leisure when it comes down to expendable goods, this truly will be difficult.』

I lightly raised my hand.

Pushing up his glasses with the middle finger of his right hand to correct their positioning, the Fourth glared at me.

『Yes, failure Lyle-kun?』

"Failure!? Isn't that just a little harsh? Um~ how should I put this, I'm sure I already have the protective gear and weapons."

When I said that, the Third broke into a large burst of laughter.

I was taken aback, and the Seventh Generation cleared his throat as he glared at the Third.

With an expression that implied, ‘oh dear,’ the Third began to explain.

『When you know your enemy’s one that flies through the sky, you’ve too little equipment adequate to deal with that. I’ve fought a Hippogryph a couple of times, and trying to aim magic at them is quite a pain.』

Against a flying enemy, I had assumed that magic attacks would be fine, but to that, the Second spoke.

『Bows are also quite difficult. It’s great if you manage to hit one in the eye, but how many archers of that level of skill do you think there are out there… I really hope you’re not thinking you’ll manage somehow with a sabre.』

I tried explaining to the two of how I planned to do it with magic.

“I was planning on using widescale instead of focused magic attacks to…”

Hippogryphs are the same, but it’s hard to aim precisely at a flying enemy. Then what should you do?

Suppress them with numbers, or attack a large area.

Hearing that, the Second spoke.

『Fooool! What about the place? Coordination? On top of not even knowing if you’re commander’s capable, on top of there being a high probability a large number of the troops are going to be deployed up front to crush it, what are you being so carefree about?』

When you use magic, it’s necessary to make sure no one gets drawn into it.

If allies were around, then magic use wasn’t happening.

Of course, it’s a different story when those allies were luring the monster out.

The Fifth let out a sigh.

『Ralph's confirmed the equipment of the knight brigade, right? With a sword and spear, just what is it they plan on fighting?』

As per usual, the knights were mainly armed with sword and spear.

Projectiles such as bows and crossbows weren't spread among the knights of Centralle.

No, while there wasn't a trend to use them, it's not like they weren't there.

With a convenient ready-to-use firearm called magic in hand, there was a trend, where it was thought such weapons weren't worthy of knights.

The Sixth snorted.

『It's because big game rarely comes out in the area around the capital. I doubt they're evaluating the Hippogryph too high. While it may be weaker than an Ogre… they're underestimating the threat of its aerial capabilities too much.』

The Seventh agreed.

『If they're truly from a skilled lord, then a Hippogryph would be nothing but prey. It's because it's quite often that a *Feudal Lord* has to request for the subjugation of bandits and beasts.』

I felt the atmosphere surrounding me grow tense.

(The nobles of the capital, and the provincial nobles don't seem to get along too well, or how should I put this…)

I tried asking them all.

"Um, about the court nobles and knights of the Imperial Capital, um, how do you all, well…"

After I said that much, Second up…

『I hate them.』
『I hate the king as well.』

『I can't say I like them.』
『Noisy rats.』
『Complete hate.』
『It's not a matter of like or hate. I want to kill them all.』

But the First Generation was a former court knight.

As the third son, it's not like he was succeeding that peerage, but the Walt House did have some relation to the Imperial Nobles.

"Eh, but, didn't Milleia-san marry in, and there's this relation and that, and…"

When I said that, the Third responded with a bright smile.

『Lyle, let me teach you an important phrase… this is this, and that is that!』

My face twitched, and the Fifth continued.

『Well, I doubt they think too highly of Feudal Lords either. I mean, based on the times, they occasionally have to go at each other's throats.』

The Seventh made a serious expression.

『Yesterday's drinking buddy, today's enemy… it isn't a rare case. But it's not like the world is divided so easily. That's why.』

"This is this, and that is that… is it?"

When I said that with a tired tone, everyone nodded.

The Fifth kindly informed me.

『Even if a factional dispute breaks out, a Feudal Lord should only assist if there's something to be gained. And that is supposed to work for both side's sake. In truth, that zone's quite flexible. Now then, to return to topic, get your equipment and members together soon. It's not just Lyle's responsibility alone.』

Thankful for the Fifth's plain follow-up, I tried asking for everyone's opinion.

The ones reliable on this sort of expedition were the Second and the Third.

The Fifth and Sixth did have similar experience, but they barely had a chance to experience fighting under another's lead.

The Third spoke.

『You should've learned what the commanding knight missy liked, and sent in a bribe. 』

The Second agreed.

『Right. If possible, if you had Marcus take it over, it would make discussions end quickly.』

"Eh? Bribe?"

While I did think that was a bit much, the Second sent me a serious look.

『You really are that, aren't you. Too good a kid.』

On the Second's tired tone, the Third laughed as he spoke.

『It's fine and all to think about it with that mindset too. It's just that…』

The Third halted his laughter, and turned serious as well.

『If it's going to save lives, that's a small price to pay. What's more, it isn't just us this time. Those useless two are tagging along. On top of that, your request is even supposed to be to guard them.』

Both Marcus-san and Breid-san had little experience camping outside and defeating monsters.

Marcus-san just took up seasonal defensive jobs.

The Second spoke.

『If it turns out to be impossible no matter what, then prioritize your own companions, and abandon the two. If Novem-chan dies, I'll be cursing you for the rest of your life.』

On the twos' threats, I gulped down some saliva, and perhaps thinking his coercion had worked, they crumbled their earnest expression.

The Third laughed as he spoke.

To the two of them, bribery was just a single method.

Calling it bribery was putting it in a bad light. In truth, it was a method to smoothly proceed human relations, or so he said.

『It's a single method. Here's a gift, I hope we get alone, that sort of thing. It's best you don't think too deeply about it. I mean, you accomplish your end goal. But this time's opponent is a little questionable. She seems to be the type that only wants achievements, after all.』

The Second seemed to be of the same opinion.

『Yeah, they exist. Those guys that work you to the bone to hog the merits for themselves. Well, in the end, they usually get the resentment of those around them. It's never a decent end to them.』

The Fourth interposed.

『A knight who had barely become twenty, was it? She's probably lacking in experience, and if she doesn't have any experiencing commanding on the scale of this mission, it sure makes one anxious.』

I did look a little into the female knight,【Norma Arnette】.

With her strong desire for a promotion, she was an individual for which the bad rumors simply wouldn't die down.

When you think of why such a person was selected as the person in charge, the conclusion one would reach is…

『She's a knight that it wouldn't really matter whether she was there or not. As talented as she may be, she disrupts the peace. That sort of thing.』

On the Third's words, everyone nodded.

The Seventh spoke.

『Yeah, they do exist. Those that do unnecessary things to provoke the resentment of those around them.』

The Fourth hit his hands together.

『Yes, yes, the conversation derailed again. Now then, let's think about how to raise Lyle's group's chances of survival.』

The Second scratched his face.

『Well, we can't just go about hiring more hands willy nilly. If there was a little more time, then…』

For our expedition to come, we did have some leisure in purchasing supplies.

But our party had very few acquaintances here.

There wasn't really any adventurer work, so I've no idea what sort of people I'd find of our same trade.

I couldn't really bring along anyone useless, and properly inviting someone would take more time than we had.

The Third spoke.

『It may be nice to gather up Marcus' and Breid's acquaintances, but I doubt they'd even have any equipment. What's more, they'd likely be a hindrance.』

The Fifth spoke.

『If you had some more time, you could've hired some skilled guys with money. Well, this time our request's just to protect those two, and it's not like we have to defeat the monsters.』

The Sixth spoke.

『But I doubt those two'd be satisfied with that. They do seem impatient to get some service in, but whether they'll be able to move immediately or not is…』

When I opened my mouth, the air around became quite awkward.

“Um, if they received training, shouldn’t they be able to move to an extent? I don’t think they’ll be completely useless. Also, Marcus’s a knight, so he must be practicing properly.”

The Second put his hand to his face and spoke.

『Yep. That’s quite right. If everyone practiced properly, there wouldn’t be a problem… ‘If he did it properly’, that is.』

The Seventh followed through for me.

『… It’s because Lyle’s a capable child. Look, it hasn’t even been a year since he ventured into the world of society. I think it’s natural for him not to understand things in that field.』

The Fifth looked to me with a doubtful face.

『No… yeah. I do think you’re quite competent. In truth, you have succeeded time and again, and you’re putting out results beyond imagination. It’s just, you see…』

The Fourth spoke.

『You’re too capable, that you’re no good. You can’t understand the rest of them.』

The Third spoke.

『It’s because starting with Novem, you’ve only been surrounded by competent people. If you’re looking for a truly no good child, then perhaps Shannon-chan’s your best bet?』

The Sixth offered opposition to that opinion.

『While she may be no good, she’s cute, is she not!?』

The Sixth did offer some favor to Miranda-san and Shannon.

When I sat troubled, the Second talked to me.

『Anyways, what we’re trying to say is this. Don’t just assume that everyone around you is a wise guy like you.』

I couldn’t really understand those words.

❼

In preparation for tomorrow’s departure, we went over everyone’s equipment once more.

Having bought himself chainmail, and procured a weapon, Breid-san looked much more dignified than before.

Marcus-san had changed the sword hanging at his waist to a new one.

As for us, we had draped fur robes over the equipment we obtained in Arumsaas.

My armaments were a sabre and a bow, and the rest of them were equipped with their usual weapons.

I did think about having all of them carry a bow or crossbow, but there wasn’t the time to train, and even if these numbers had a means for long distance attack, I concluded it wouldn’t produce too much an effect.

I mean, we don’t have too many.

If we had more people, it would be thinkable to gather up crossbows.

But with nine, and a high probability we can’t trust the rest of the legion, it was likely safest to use the equipment we were each best suited with for self-defense…

(Even when we’re going out to hunt monsters, for me to have to pay caution to allied units as well…)

The request was for me to protect Marcus-san and Breid-san.

I want to keep the both of them out of danger, but then they wouldn’t be able to rack up any achievements, so there was a possibility they would run wild.

Breid-san gave me his thanks.

“Thank you, Lyle-kun. With this, I can finally stand on the starting line.”

When I returned him a sarcastic smile, Miranda-san appeared to become sullen.

I didn’t understand the reson, but Marcus-san did seem pleased.

“With this, at least our appearance is in order. Now then, about this gathering’s leader…”

Leader.

Right, this party’s leader wasn’t me.

There was status and such to consider, but to the end, I was just here on a request from the Circry house to protect them.

On paper, I was participating as a soldier hired by Marcus-san.

From a smile, Breid-san’s face instantly turned to a pout.

“Well status-wise, that would be you, I’ll bet. But I’ve no intention to work under you.”

“… Oy, so you plan on acting alone?”

As Marcus-san’s expression turned serious, the party of two in dresses…

Doris-san and Lucy-san stuck themselves in.

“The leader has to be Breid, right!? Just who do you think you guys are working for!? It’s father’s orders. Then obey the one directly related to the Circry House, Breid!”

Doris-san continued glaring at us.

And Lucy-san was…

“Why must Marcus obey a mere servant who isn’t even a knight!? If you’re going to be following someone, follow Marcus!”

If you forced me to say, then both of them are inexperienced, and unreliable.

(No, unless we work together, no one's going to be commended for anything.)

But it seems compromise wasn't an option here.

There, Miranda-san hit her hands together.

After gathering the surrounding gazes on her, she promptly began giving instructions.

"On paper, Marcus-san will be the leader, and in essense, we'll be moving on Lyle's orders. If you don't like that, then I'd appreciate you didn't take part in the expedition."

Breid-san stood in front of her.

"Milady, that's a bit…"

That wasn't acceptable.

Perhaps because I was younger, or because he wanted to be leader himself.

But Miranda-san continued to stick her glare on him.

"By yourself, you couldn't even get your equipment together, nor do you even have any battle experience. I truly hope this isn't the first time you're ever leaving the capital, right? There's no way I'll follow the orders of such a man."

Novem agreed.

"Right. I think having Marcus-san named as the official leader, and having Breid-san under him is best. There's no problem in an actual knight such as Marcus taking the position, but the other way around is a little…"

I doubt anyone around would understand why a servant was leading a knight.

That's the society we lived in, and in truth, there were many knights

in positions similar to Marcus-san.

Breid-san spoke on with a face full of resolve.

“In that case, I alone will…”

“Who’s the one who put up the money for that armor? It would be troublesome for us if you went off and died on your own. The guarantor for your debt is my father. That father of mine… the Circry house’s head left the protection of the two of you to us. If you’re going to be going off by yourself, I’ll have you pull out of this operation as a whole. And if you don’t like that, cast off your equipment, and join in naked.”

Miranda-san’s harsh words caused Marcus-san’s expression to cramp.

He spoke to me in a quiet voice.

“Hey, I heard the Circry’s eldest daughter was supposed to be the kind one…”

I averted my face, and responded.

“Eh, no… s-she’s kind. Surely.”

From within the Jewel, I heard the Third’s voice.

『Yes, she really is kind. To Lyle and Shannon-chan only, that is.』

The ones unsatisfied by that arrangement included Doris-san and Lucy-san as well.

To the two of them, Miranda-san spoke.

“If you’re going to act all high and mighty, do it after you pay the money for it all. Why not understand for a second that you’re forcing your lovers to their deathbeds?”

Doris-san shot back.

“What’s with you!? It’s just a knight excursion, isn’t it? Also, unless Breid-san goes this far, he won’t even become a low ranked knight! He’s different from that man who looks like a villain standing over

there!”

Marcus-san was scratching his head awkwardly.

I’ll bet he was quite conscious of the fact he looked like a delinquent.

Regardless, the atmosphere he gave off was quite light.

Lucy-san also butted in.

“Marcus-san is a splendid knight! Don’t lump him together with some lowly servant!”

And looking at me, Lucy-san went on.

“I know it. That man over there was the former heir of a Count House, and he was kicked out for his ineptitude. How perfect for oneesama. One abandoned brat for another.”

While thinking of how she sure liked stabbing it in the painful places, I turned to Breid-san.

There, I felt a somewhat gloomy something that hadn’t been there before.

(So I’ve no choice but to hunt monsters with these members. That’s just great.)

If it’s like this, it would’ve been better if or party did it all by ourselves.

But I did accept the request, so there’s no helping it.

(I guess I was too naïve.)

Miranda-san hit across Lucy-san’s face with the palm of her hand.

From within the Jewel, I heard a voice.

It was the Third.

『You sure are loved, Lyle.』

Lucy-san, who had fallen on the ground, and Miranda-san nearby.

The servants watching the scene up-close were unsure of what to do.

Even if she was driven out of the house, she was once the eldest daughter of the House.

One of them ran off inside the mansion for help, and a voice came to stop it.

“M-milady, any more is…”

“Shut it! Lucy, I will not get involved with the Circry House any longer. It’s because I was kicked out of it. But on top of sending your boyfriend to his death, you can’t even determine what’s alright and what’s not to say to the one protecting his life?”

Doris-san was hiding behind Breid-san.

She probably had never seen Miranda-san’s angry face.

Lucy-san was also afraid.

“B-but it’s just a knight dispatch, and…”

“… Go and ask father. If it really was safe, he’d never have made the request to us.”

And Miranda-san turned back to us.

“At least on the surface, we’ll make Marcus-san our representative. He’s a knight, so there won’t be a problem, and Breid doesn’t have any experience in real battle. Objectors are to be left behind. With their equipment confiscated.”

Marcus-san and Breid-san reluctantly nodded, and like that, Miranda took complete control of the situation.

“Look, you two are in the ways, so scurry off somewhere.”

She drove away her two younger sisters, and began discussing the departure set to happen tomorrow.

The Fourth spoke.

『Lyle, you're the one who's supposed to be taking charge here, you know.』

Yes, I knew that myself, but I had not the will to interfere with Miranda-san's momentum.

(I-I'll be careful next time.)

❼

… The day of departure.

In the capital, the knight squadron was making final preparations for the trip.

The knight, 【Norma Arnette】, looked looked over the volunteer soldiers gathered before her blue eyes.

Her silky brown hair cut at a length that didn't touch her shoulders swayed in the wind.

"As I thought, it's cold."

The knight that was her aid nodded in agreement.

"More have gathered here than expected. Food as well, but we may even be short of firewood. We'll have to gather some on the way."

He was a middle-aged man, and he had a slight mustache growing on his face.

"Then our movement speed will drop. As long as we use them sparingly, there won't be a problem."

"B-but in this sort of cold, that's too…"

Even when he was the older one, the man unable to get a promotion was stuck as Norma's aide.

His name was 【Clark Usher】.

He had a wide forehead, and in order to conceal that, he had grown out his bangs. Light brown hair, and black eyes. A plump knight of

short build.

(This is why you can never get a promotion. You are… the adjutant to these knights. Just what are the higher-ups thinking?)

The weapon in his hand was a crossbow.

There was a sword hanging at his waist, but he had snuck out a crossbow said to work well against monsters like Hippogryphs from the storehouse their brigade had been charged with.

Norma hated her aid, who had taken such an arbitrary act on his own.

“We can’t go about caring for each and every volunteer. We just brought up the proposal because we were short on numbers.”

Hearing that, Clark dropped his shoulders.

“… I’ll go confirm the number of volunteers then.”

Seeing Clark leave the scene, Norma scoffed.

Her standing form, even in armor, was splendid enough to make for a pretty picture, but she was a woman who gave off quite a thorny impression.

She looked at the surrounding soldiers.

(I’ll have to do whatever I can to get some achievements on this voyage. But there really are a lot of volunteers. Not that there’s anyone out there to steal up the glory.)

As a knight, Norma had confidence in her own skills.

As she waited for the scheduled departure time to come, things suddenly began to get noisy.

“What is it. Just what… is…”

Before her eyes, a lump of iron was heading in her direction.

In front of it, were two well-equiped men, and some lightly armored women.

Pushing aside the noisy soldiers and volunteers, Clark came running.

“Captain Norma, That is the volunteer applicant, Marcus Carning. It seems he hired some adventurers, and that is something like those adventurers’ horse-drawn carriage.”

Norma looked over Clark with tired eyes.

“And just where exactly do you see a horse? Why not confirm it properly for once!?”

“No, according to those involved, that’s some sort of Golem, its name is Porter, and while there aren’t any real horses attached, it’s purposed for baggage carrying without a doubt…”

Norma wanted to avoid any disorder upon coming here.

But even if they were in a rush, their appearances were in order, and sending them away would give worry about their fighting force.

Among the volunteers, there were plenty who didn’t have any proper equipment.

“Che, fine! If you’ve confirmed everything, then we’re moving out already. For anyone petitioning to join in, turn them away if they don’t have their own weapons!”

Clark spoke in sarcasm.

“Captain Norma, normally, shouldn’t these checks have been done beforehand? I was also assigned to be adjutant for this squad quite suddenly, but if you knew about them from the start, then shouldn’t you have…”

“I don’t have the time to meddle in such trifling matters! Let’s just finish the preparations to depart already!”

After driving Clark away, Norma headed towards where her own horse was stationed.

There, knights were conversing with their own subordinates.

When Norma came close, the talking stopped.

(They're much too lax. Why is it that the men assigned to me are always…)

Put in the leadership position of this mission, Norma had taken quite a few measures in her own way.

She had gone around to viscount mansions all around, and consulted whether she could procure any funding from them.

(I've made sure to assemble knights capable of magic. Now all we have to do is let them deal with the Hippogryph.)

She had much experience of working under another, but today, she was the one in charge.

After a while, Clark ran up again.

"Captain Norma, there are much too many without proper equipment. Turning them away will…"

"Make it short, Clark!"

Seeing Clark being yelled at by a woman younger than himself, the young knights in the area began to grin.

Perhaps deciding to do as he was told, Clark headed towards his own horse.

Confirming that the preparations were in place, Norma spoke.

"Henceforth, we will be heading off to subjugate the Hippogryph at Johnny Village!"

Through the large gates of the Imperial Capital, came Norma, with her mass of troops not equipped to satisfaction…

5 - March

We departed from the Imperial Capital of Centralle, and when noon had come and passed, the Johnny Village expedition stopped for a rest.

We did leave early in the morning, and we were to take a break when it got to noon.

The large mess of a group was unable to match walking pace, so I found it quite annoying.

“We’re moving slower than the information gathered had me believe.”

My comrades were the same, but the problem were the surrounding allies.

Using the Fifth’s and Sixth’s Skills to check the surroundings, I found us surrounded by yellow points.

It was a situation I couldn’t think of as surrounded by friendlies.

The Second gave a warning from the Jewel.

『I said it before, but don’t just concentrate your attention on your enemies. No matter how you look at it, they were insufficient in scrapping together supplies. When night falls, there’s sure to be some idiot on the move.』

I clenched the Jewel, and looked at Clara.

“Clara, I’ll operate Porter next. You can rest until your turn comes around.”

But she shook her head.

“Before a support like me takes a break, I think it should be Aria-san and Miranda-san getting some rest.”

It was an earnest response fitting of her, but using my Skills, I could

tell.

Everyone was more fatigued than usual.

(So an unfamiliar environment is rough on all…)

I tried persuading Clara.

“There’s a need for us to keep Aria and Miranda-san on lookout duty. Also, the reason I wanted you to take a rest now was so you could keep watch at night.”

Clara looked around.

She had lived quite some time as an adventurer, so she had more experience than us. But it seems she had never taken up a mercenary job like this one before.

However, surveying around, she did seem to notice it.

“There wasn’t an order for nighttime watch, but it seems we’l have to take responsibility for that ourselves. Understood.”

As Clara consented, I looked over the camp.

Separated from the main road, we were stationed by the roadside.

I tried gnawing on the provision bread, and found it to be more modest than what we had prepared ourselves. Perhaps it was a blessing in just that it was edible, but there were quite a few unsatisfied faces.

From the Jewel, the Fifth spoke.

『Lyle, this gathering is brittle. Even if the knights have a certain level of ability, there are plenty that don’t even have any decent equipment.』

Since we stood out so much, it was actually quite thinkable that we would be targeted.

And when monsters come out, just what are they…

(Small fries have appeared only twice. The knights eventually take

care of them, so we aren't suffering any damages, but they really slow us down.)

There were quite a few small parties that couldn't react when monsters appeared.

There were also those participating individually, and when it came down to actual battle, they had no idea how to move.

During break.

Close to me, besides Clara, there was the two targets we were to guard.

Novem was remaining vigilant of the surroundings, Aria and Miranda-san were lying down, drinking the hot beverage Shannon had prepared.

Monica did try to come out, but I kept her contained within Porter.

The Third gave a proposal.

『It will be a pain for you all to move separately. I want to propose you all stay together. Lyle, go tell Marcus to report to the higherups.』

Having marched with their full equipment in tow, both Marcus-san and Breid-san were making tired faces.

"Marcus-san, there's something I want you to convey to the person in charge.

"Eh? What's that?"

He was quite spaced out.

(No, there are lots of people around, but that doesn't mean you can grow lax… I guess it's fine for now.)

Before I could caution him, I made sure to convey the proposal to him.

"There are a lot of people operating in parties, but there's a considerable amount of individuals as well. If possible, I think it

would be easier to handle if we were grouped together, so please propose that to the corresponding parties.”

There, Marcus-san scratched his head.

“No, well, there’s no one I’m acquainted with here. Wouldn’t it be best if you went and told them, Lyle? You’ve got some experience with this, right?”

Yes, it certainly would be easier if I said this, but it’s at times like these that my status as an adventurer becomes a pain.

To the end, I’m just participating under Marcus-san’s hire.

The Fourth offered a complaint.

『Even if Lyle says it, he’ll be rejected, so why don’t you go swing about that status you’re so proud about!? … Che. Not that he can hear me or anything.』

He seemed quite irritated.

I softened up the Fourth’s opinion, before conveying it.

“I doubt they would hear me out. They’re more likely to listen to you.”

After I said that, Marcus-san reluctantly stood up, and went off towards a knight resting nearby.

Seeing his back, Breid-san opened his mouth.

“Good grief, all the ones unworthy of their position are getting Noble Status. How lamentable.”

Hearing that, Clara sat down with her knees to the ground, and shot me a sidelong glance.

The road here was the same. Breid-san was always full of complaints.

Towards me and Marcus-san, that is.

Since he learned I was the former heir to a Count House, he began

to take some distance.

The Sixth spoke.

『I won't tell him not to envy, but that man sure is a bag of bitchery. Having him along will ruin the mood of the whole march.』

The Second agreed.

『It's at times like these that I wish for a bright mood maker-like entity. Aria and Miranda-chan are down in the dumps, Shannon-chan and Monica are stuck inside Porter… they really should consider the mood.』

The resting knight looked in our direction, before saying something to Marcus-san.

But he didn't move at all, so the Third gave up.

『… This is no good. It's as if this group has no motivation whatsoever. Let's change up the objective. Lyle, the next time a monster pops up, do whatever is in your power to stand out as you defeat it. Make it as flashy as physically possible.』

It was something possible, so I gripped the Jewel.

It was the sign of affirmation.

The Fifth offered a suggestion.

『Marcus and Breid are useless. There's no time. Have all of your party observe the faces around. Try to spot ones who look the least bit useful, and win them over.』

I moved to Clara's side, and acted in accordance with the Fifth's instruction.

"Clara, do you have a moment?"

"Yes?"

"When we begin moving after this break, can you try observing those around us?"

She nodded.

“You want me to be vigilant of those that look like they’d cause us harm, correct?”

“Ah, no, there’s that as well, but… if possible, I’d like to find some that look willing enough to help us.”

I lowered my shoulders, and looked at Marcus, as I tried thinking of some words to encourage him.

“If possible, I want to increase our numbers.”

After I left it at that, Clara seemed to understand.

“It looks like it was the right course of action to gather up so many supplies. Just offering some out may be enough to gain allies… I’ll inform Novem-san and the others myself.”

Clara stood, and headed over to Novem.

And I went and walked towards Marcus-san.

Just his posture was enough to make it clear he had failed.

In a small voice, Breid…

“This is why this man’s…”

… I’d like it if he made it so we couldn’t hear his complaints.

Marcus-san did hear it, but because he was the one who failed to get the proposal accepted, he irritatedly held it in.

“Sorry. They just told me, ‘yeah, go do whatever you want.’”

“They really don’t have any motivation. Well, just knowing that much is enough. When it comes down to it, we’ll do something ourselves.”

“What’s that? You have a plan?”

Marcus-san asked, and I answered while remaining vigilant of the surroundings.

“Well, I’m just going to go on a flashy rampage.”

“The hell?”

As Marcus-san looked at me in wonder, I used my Skills to search for enemies in the vicinity.

❼

The battle happened a while later.

Perhaps reacting to the movement of such a large force, we suffered a goblin attack the moment we broke through the woods.

When I got to the volunteer attacked by the armed monsters, he was already covered in blood.

It wasn’t my job, but I looked around, and raised a loud voice.

“Fall back! I’ll take them on!”

Drawing a sabre with my left hand, I let out a slight complaint.

“I’d have appreciated it if they appeared in a place easier to keep watch of.”

The number of goblins attacking was five, but I instantly slashed at the closest one, and began to cast magic.

“Let’s make it flashy… Lightning!”

Attack speed, output.

Lightning attribute magic was easy to use, so I used it in a considerable frequency.

Of all else, it sure was gaudy, so it corresponded with my current objective.

The goblins that tried to run were charred black, and discharged sparks as they collapsed onto the ground.

Because he had heard such a loud rumble, a horse-mounted knight raced over.

After finishing them off, I sheathed my sabre, and looked at the approaching knight.

A crossbow was fastened to the horse, and a plump, short knight came over to me.

Skillfully maneuvering his mount, he was a middle-aged man with a slight mustache as his trademark.

“Where’s the enemy!? What’s the damage level!?”

I sent a glance to the goblins, and began to explain the situation.

“The five bodies here account for all of them. They’ve already been defeated. There’s one wounded from the attack. There’s one among my companions capable of treatment. Should I bring her over?”

Hearing that, the knight looked around as he gave his thanks.

“I see. You’ve really saved us there. Even so, you used magic… you look like quite a skilled magician. What’s your name? Oh, I’m【Clark Usher】, by the way. The adjutant of this expeditionary force.”

To Clark-san, who named himself as the aide to the female knight I saw before departing, I named myself.

“I’m Lyle. An adventurer hired by Marcus Carning.”

The Second opened his mouth.

『You’re really selling the name. If only their lookout was a little more competent… well, those that are to pass this point later are sure to see the aftermath of the battle.』

I headed towards the injured volunteer, and the ones surrounding him, that seemed to be his comrades.

Clark-san called out to me.

“Oh, so you’re from that peculiar party… I’ll remember it. Since you defeated the monster, the magic stone and materials belong to you. If you plan on collecting them, make sure you don’t fall behind. I have to give a report, so I must be on my way.”

Saying that, Clark-san gave instructions to a number of the surrounding knights, and galloped off.

The nearby knights were watching in a daze.

Everyone else was also looking at the knights with troubled faces.

They had been stationed in order to keep watch of the troops, but it was if they hadn't done anything at all.

The fourth spoke.

『It looks like there's a reason they were sent on this mission. It's best if you keep that adjutant in mind. Perhaps you should take some wine over to him when night comes.』

The Seventh added on.

『Lyle, even if your main goal is that knight, he'll have plenty of subordinates around him. If you're going to go, bring a considerable quantity. Have Monica cook something up.』

The Third added on even more.

『A hot meal will make all the difference. But make sure to make Marcus do it. You're just support here, Lyle. 』

While wondering if it was really alright to do such a thing, I decided to consent.

And I called out to the collapsed soldier.

He was bloodstained, but perhaps his wounds weren't too deep, as he maintained consciousness.

"Are you alright?"

"Does this look alright? Dammit! Even when I finally got to go out as a volunteer soldier!"

Seeing the injured young man let out a mortified voice, I made a bitter smile.

A nearby older man came to my aid.

“What do you think you’re saying to the man who saved you!? I apologize. He isn’t a bad kid. You said you had someone capable of treatment, right? I understand how discourteous the question may be, but can you save him?”

Looking at their equipment, the older leader-ish man had chainmail equipped, but the younger one, and those around him had mixed and matched protective gear.

“My comrades are stationed further back. Can you help me carry him there?”

There, one of his comrades spoke up.

“O-oy, what about the monster? Won’t someone nab it up?”

I looked around at the surrounding eyes.

Using my Skills, I was able to find a number of red markers. They were examining us.

“I’ll collect them when we pass. If they’re not there anymore, I don’t really mind. Right now, the injured is more important.”

As I said that, the Leader-ish man gave his thanks.

“I apologize. I’ll definitely make this up to you.”

Bringing along their party of three, I returned to Porter’s side.

❼

… Night.

Within his tent, Clark recorded the events of the day.

It wasn’t for his squadron, but a personal record of sorts.

“Little rest, low movement speed, four small-scale battles. Two injured…”

As he tallied it up by the light of the lantern, he found relief in the simple fact there had been no deserters.

If there had been casualties on the first day, the command of the corps would likely shift.

Especially if it were from something of goblin level.

He doubted his own ability to lead.

“Hah, why can none of them understand…”

Collecting up his records, Clark decided to sleep early in preparation for tomorrow. But near the tent, he heard the sound of footsteps.

“Vice chief, a guy called Marcus brought over provisions! He says he wants to give you a greeting.”

Hearing that, Clark looked to his subordinate, who seemed to be in a good mood.

Perhaps he had guided them here. Behind, were two men carrying packages.

(… Now then, what to do…)

Clark wasn’t the neatest of people. He did have experience of getting curried favor with a couple of times, but after accepting it, he would have to do something in return.

And if he turned them away, he would be making enemies.

“Let them through.”

His subordinate let the two of them into the tent, and returned to his post.

Because the entrance was left open, Clark could hear the outside situation quite well.

They seemed to be having a drinking bout.

(They sure use some underhanded methods. We barely brought any alcohol ourselves.)

Determining them unnecessary, Norma had reduced stock.

She was still too young, with too little experience in these fields. No,

more than that, if she determined something a minus to her success, she would thoroughly fail to accept it.

Saying that alcohol would dull one's decision making prowess, she had put a strict restriction on the carrying of such beverages.

"Pleasure to meet you. I'm called Marcus Carning. This time's, well… perhaps we should call it a toast to acquaintanceship."

Clark prepared some wooden boxes, and had the two seat themselves.

The orange-haired young man didn't seem to be able to calm himself down.

But the blue haired one was the youth he had met during their travels.

"… So Marcus-kun and Lyle-kun, is it? And what is it you request of me? Rather than greeting the adjutant, with barely any authority, shouldn't you be going to our captain?"

Norma hated things like this.

To be more specific, she thought that the less useful someone was, the more likely they were to take such actions to close in on those in leadership positions.

Marcus sent Lyle a glance.

After Lyle nodded, Marcus opened his mouth.

"… We want to survive this, and get some achievements for ourselves. It's just that at this rate, our survival itself is in doubt. For that sake, there were some moves we wanted to make."

"Oh, and those moves are?"

Clark looked at the food and drink set atop the wooden crate.

Even when they were camping out, it was nice and steaming.

The wine also seemed to be a relatively fine article.

“Ah~…”

Marcus looked to Lyle, so Clark spoke.

“It must be Lyle-kun’s proposal. Understood. I’ll hear you out.”

From how Marcus behaved, he likely understood just how adventurers were viewed by knights.

Clark put his hand to his chin, as he listened in on Lyle’s proposal.

“My suggestion is regarding the formation of the volunteer corps. Can we not gather the soldiers participating individually in one place? At the same time, I also want to get those working in parties together. Place someone on your side in charge of the volunteer body as a whole, and decide on the roles of specific groups during the march. And also…”

“Also?”

“With that idea still standing, instate Marcus-san as leader, and have him lead the volunteers. That is my request.”

Having the volunteer troops, which Norma had taken so lightly, to be put under firm and proper organization. That request was one that Clark and Lyle both agreed on.

But it’s not like Clark himself hadn’t been putting thought to it.

“… There’s no time to properly place them under leadership. Our captain prioritized movement, you see. I am able to gather together those participating individually. About the organization part of it, we won’t have the proper time until we reach the village.”

He looked at Lyle. After a while of silence, the boy grasped a blue crystal hanging above his chest.

(Is that a gem? Someone of such skill was hired for *this* expedition? Marcus doesn’t look like one to be able to put up that much money, but… it’s beneficial to us for now.)

Looking at Marcus, Clark was unable to understand how Lyle was hired.

Lyle spoke.

“Well then, how about just organizing the groups in formation, and deciding on someone in charge, at least?”

“… Understood. We’ll do just that. But I doubt it will turn out so well. There’ll be quite a bit of quarrelling over who should be in charge. Also, if you get the consent, then I don’t mind if you go off and lead the volunteers. It’s because it doesn’t seem our side is all too concerned with them. I did think it would end poorly at this rate.”

Looking at Clark’s troubled face, Lyle thought to himself a while.

Marcus-san didn’t seem to know what to do.

(Looks like this boy’s the real leader. Seeing his skill in magic, he’ll be more reliable than our men.)

“… The food will get cold. Our cook has quite some skill, so I can guarantee the taste.”

Clark spoke.

“That so? Then I’ll gladly accept it.”

Reaching his hand to the food, and taking a sip of the wine, Clark smiled.

“It truly is good. This cold just makes it taste needlessly better.”

Within his mind…

(Well then, I’ll have to work off the share of what I’ve been given, but how should I go about organizing them…)

Even if he picked the highest ranked knight from the list, there were plenty of knights of equal standing.

There were also second and third sons that weren’t knights, and were striving for distinguished service.

Just selecting a leader would be dreadful, and if he did it poorly, there’d be no end to the quarrels.

It’s just that, in order to gain Lyle’s party’s trust, there wasn’t the option of not taking action.

(Hah, why is it that all these troublesome jobs always get thrust at me.)

The delicious meal and wine wasn’t able to lighten his heart.

Clark started to sigh at his own lack of luck…

6 - Johnny Village

I had been naïve.

I never thought it would turn out this bad.

Looking over the disputing groups, that's the impression I held.

Morning…

Clark-san adopted my proposition, and collected the volunteer troops into several manageable masses.

It was fine up to there.

But the problem was with the groups themselves.

With around ten names being thrown about, it would all be fine if a knight took charge.

But the captain said that if we were grouping them together anyways, then it wasn't necessary to put a knight over them to monitor them, and stopped it at that.

That as long as a guarding knight with their soldiers was placed between the groups while moving, that would be enough…

Yes, if it were only during movement, then that would be fine.

But when it came to choosing a person responsible, the disputes broke out.

Even if you call them the responsible party, they were just the existence in charge of confirming numbers, and writing up reports.

Getting that position came out as quite a scramble.

"I'm the one with the higher rank dammit!"
"For someone without any decent armor, you sure have quite a mouth on ya'!"
"As if I'd let the long-awaited chance escape me!"

Among their petty contest, they greatly disputed over the assumption they would be selected as sub-captain.

The reason many even agreed to join in on such a grouping was so they could be put in charge.

Seeing that situation, I felt nothing but worn out.

"… Why is something of this level enough to…"

As I said that, Marcus-san spoke to me.

"It's not like I don't get where they're coming from. If they get into a position where they lead others, the number of chances they'll have to put their hands on glory'll increase. It ain't strange for them to think that way."

I was sure it had been a simple request.

Yes, the Hippogryph was definitely dangerous.

But it wasn't an enemy out of our league.

That's what I thought, but I had never even considered my allies would be this bad.

I realized how terrible our movements were on the first day, but now I'm even beginning to doubt if this platoon can even fight.

From within the Jewel, the Third let out a laugh.

『The hell's this supposed to be? Simply terrible.』

The Second was the same. But it seems he had some flexibility.

『They sure are arguing. What's more, they're all the more vicious because they think their livelihoods are on the line. Even when, looking at the girly leading the mission, they know they aren't being thought of as anything at all.』

The Fifth spoke.

『If it were me, I'd never want to lead such a mob.』

The Sixth…

『If I had three months, I'd cut their numbers down to more than half, and make them somewhat usable.』

When my expression cramped up, Miranda came up to me.

"Look, let's just get our meal over with already, and prepare to depart. Monica's already finished the preparations for breakfast."

While staring at the quarreling mob, I went off to my comrades eating around Porter.

❼

During movement, I rode on the loading tray of Porter to get in some rest.

The tray was quite full, but since Monica and Shannon were to ride it, we modified Porter to be able to store people.

There was a nice blanket placed there, and it was a considerably pleasant environment.

"What do you think you're doing?"

Seeing Shannon, I noticed that she was exchanging hand-knitted wool with Monica.

Every time the wool was handed over, it passed through their fingers, and changed in shape.

Besides that, there were some coiled threads letting out rustling sounds, and other toys spread about the luggage tray.

"I'm bored! When we're moving, I'm generally doing nothing but sitting. If I went out to walk around, it'd be cold, and my vision spins round and round, giving a horrid feeling!"

Angrily, Shannon accepted the wool from Monica, and perhaps she failed, as the shape fell apart.

"AAaaAAAh!! What are you going to do about this! Just how many defeats do you think that makes it for me!?"

As Shannon gave a vexed face, Monica showed off a grin.

“How naïve, little girl. I, Monica, have put more ways to kill time to memory than you could ever imagine. How laughable for you to think you’d ever win a game against a special model. Ah, I’ll give the chicken over there a moderate chance of victory. Otherwise, it won’t be any fun.”

Once you hear about that business-like play, it doesn’t become any fun anymore.

“Che, if I can’t win, I don’t care anymore. I’ll go knit or something.”

The unseeing Shannon took out a knitted work in progress, and began to braid it.

Seeing that, Monica began cleaning up.

“You sure knit well despite your lack of eyesight.”

When I gave my impression, Shannon bent her back in pride, and made a gesture of pushing out her non-existent chest.

“I just can’t see as you can, but I am properly taking in the information around me. Unlike you.”

I grabbed her scoffing cheeks, and pulled them apart.

“Wow, they’re soft.”

“Ow! I’m tellin’ ya’, that hurts! It’ll rip! Stop it! It hurts, doesn’t it!?”

Hearing that, Monica began to fidget. She took fleeting glances at the door installed on Porter’s rear, and she appeared to be waiting for something.

“What are you doing?”

As I asked that, I removed my hands from Shannon’s cheeks. She clicked her tongue.

“Che! I thought that people misunderstanding the situation from those words would storm right in! I was sure of it! Why is it that such conventions are falling flat now, of all times? … Read the mood

already.”

Leaving misunderstandings aside, isn’t the one failing to read the mood Monica? While I was thinking that, Porter came to a stop.

It was too early for a break, so I stood, and immediately jumped outside.

I closed Porter’s door behind me, and confirmed the surroundings.

“What happened?”

Aria, who had been walking behind, gave me an explanation.

“It’s a monster. The knights are taking it on. Even so, it doesn’t look like they have any intention of putting us to use.”

When I looked in the direction of Aria’s eyes, I saw an orc surrounded by knights.

They did have their weapons held aloft, but just by surrounding it, they were unable to land a finishing blow.

The one who finally ended it was Clark-san.

Still mounted, he fired off his crossbow, embedding an arrow through the orc’s head.

I heard a voice from the Jewel.

『Heh, the man’s not half bad.』

It was the Second’s voice.

But as the pierced orc fell to its knees, a single female knight rushed up on her horse, and leapt off.

While falling towards the orc, she swung her sword, and imbued her blade with magic as she cut off its head.

It had a bit of flashiness to it, and it seemed like quite a user-friendly magic.

But my impression was different.

Aria let out a whistle.

“Amazing. The damn thing burst into flames.”

The orc before my eyes blazed up, and the female knight returned her sword to its scabbard.

But Aria hadn’t been speaking praise.

“But was there really a need to go that far? It looked like it was already over.”

An arrow through the head.

After that, they just had to keep it surrounded, and under surveillance. Even if a final blow was still required, there was no need to purposely go that far.

(Did she do it to stand out in the end?)

As I thought that, the young man Novem had treated called out to me.

After saving him, we negotiated to have him follow our orders, and at the moment, we had him accompany along Marcus-san.

“As expected of a real knight, I guess. She’s a decurio, right?”

The youth who didn’t possess any decent equipment himself sent yearning eyes.

“I wonder if I’ll ever be able to be like her.”

Of the two he brought along, the older man let out a slightly tired voice.

“You guys are never serious when it comes down to it, so why is it only at times like these that you’re…”

He seemed to have noticed.

Seeing them, Aria looked a little disappointed at the party of three.

(If they’ve never went outside to combat monsters, I guess that’s how one would feel.)

Seeing the ability of the knights, I truly did feel the female decurio did have an extent of skill to her.

But the one whose movements were the best was Clark-san.

If possible, the female knight who forcibly came to land the finishing blow, Norma, wasn't one I'd like to fight alongside on the battlefield.

After the fire went out, the soldiers that had been accompanying the knights began collecting up the magic stones and materials.

During that time, Clark-san remained vigilant of the surroundings, and issued out orders.

He knew what he was doing.

Even so, Norma-san had mounted her horse again, and returned to the head of the troops.

The Seventh let out a fed-up voice.

『Why can't she leave the work to her subordinates? She's supposed to be the commaner of these troops, is she not?』

The Third laughed.

『If you look at her as a single knight, then sure, she's skilled, but she's useless when it comes to managing people. Well, she's young, so perhaps she wants some merits. When they kill monsters, doesn't the army rack up a kill score, or something?』

To the knights of the imperial capital, the number of monsters one defeated was regarded as an important proof of having fulfilled one's duty.

And it was also a proof of one's strength.

Small fries of goblin level weren't going to be counted in, but orcs and ogres made for ample results.

The numbers dealt with one-on-one were especially emphasized, it seems.

Aria watched Norma return, and as the group had begun to move on,

she stared at the soldiers that were still stuck on gathering the materials.

“We’re moving already? It would be fine to wait a little, right?”

I spoke to Aria.

“They must be in a hurry. The numbers of times we’re encountering monsters is rising, and every time, the platoon comes to a stop. Perhaps our arrival time will be much later than predicted.”

Aria seemed unsatisfied.

“Lyle… why did you accept this request? You’re supposed to be our leader, and I don’t want to put my mouth into your decisions in that field, but even if it was from Miranda’s father, I’m sure you could have refused.”

I walked forward, and looked at the sky.

And I muttered the reason I had taken it on.

“… I probably took it too lightly.”

When I said that, Aria began staring at me reproachfully.

“Hey, why is it that you sometimes act so carefree? I’m sure our lives are just a little bit at risk here, just to let you know?”

Having been told that, I scratched my head.

I mulled over whether to state the real reason, but that wouldn’t change that I had taken it lightly, so I kept my mouth shut.

(Even if I tell her my ancestor didn’t want to see a village sacrificed, I doubt that would get me anywhere.)

The Second especially, was quite irritated when he heard of this mission.

It’s true that even I had held some sentiment like, ‘if my naïve thoughts can save someone, then…’

As a result, we were now in quite a terrible situation.

(Yeah, before I accepted it, I really should have investigated it more. I really am naïve. That's for sure.)

The sky was clouded over, and the sigh that escaped my mouth was white.

❼

We arrived at Johnny Village on the fifth day.

On the way there, the division into groups did end up bringing some results.

Preparing campgrounds, and keeping watch. The troops also began to learn to act as a group.

Even so, from the ancestors' points of view, they were still as inept as before.

When we arrived, the one to greet us was a man with graying long hair, that was quite tangled up.

The man who was the village's chief, looked much more aged than his actual years due to the enervation apparent in his expression.

A few of the housing structures were partially destroyed, and the logs that had been erected around to defend the village had collapsed in some places.

Perhaps they had been attacked time and again. All of the villagers had the same tired faces.

And they looked to us in fright.

As I received those stares, as if they were looking upon an enemy, Novem, who was quite close to me, spoke.

"… It looks like we're scaring them."

"We did come planning to rescue them, though."

When I said that, Novem kindly informed me.

“It does look like quite a small village, so just having over a hundred armed soldiers arrive is enough of a fright. Also, they’ve likely been assaulted a number of times.”

The nearby monsters had settled into a routine of using the village as their feeding grounds.

The frightful villagers looked at me from the windows of the houses.

When I returned their gazes, they slammed them shut.

Marcus-san looked at them and spoke.

“How unpleasant. Even after we came all the way here.”

While making his sarcasm quite blatant, Breid-san agreed.

“Perhaps because such a villainous-looking knight was among us? That aside, it really isn’t a good sight for the soul. For them to be taking that attitude.”

From our point of view, it surely looked that way.

But to the two of them, Novem spoke.

“… Even if you continue to hold such sentiment, I ask that you don’t speak it to any of the villagers.”

Both of them looked in wonder.

I was the same, but in my case, the Second was there to explain it.

『Help has arrived? It’s because you guys hold such feelings that it’s no good at all! This is an area under direct imperial control! It’s what you damn imperial knights are obligated to protect! Who do you think you should be thanking that you can put bread on the table!? When bastards who don’t understand that much show up all high and mighty…』

While the Second started to complain, the Seventh called out.

『They’ve grown too large, that their roles have been divided. Perhaps they don’t feel such a sense of responsibility for this land. I’ll bet the palace is the same. Regardless of what tiny village falls to

ruin, or finds salvation, it's but a minor fragment of an occurrence.』

It wasn't their responsibility.

While it certainly wasn't Marcus's job, as he didn't have any relevant position, if you asked whether or not it was his responsibility, the answer would be dubious.

Marcus-san was a knight who didn't even particularly want much work.

But the very fact he was a knight gave him an obligation to protect the people.

(They really have it rough. Imperial knights and nobles.)

Novem looked towards the party of three operating with us.

"You gentlemen as well."

The man with a bad mouth to him nodded, due to his debt to her.

"No, well, I'll abide because I've been saved by you, but isn't this village's attitude the pits?"

The frivolous-looking man that was his comrade was the same.

"Right. We ran all the way here from Centralle and all."

The older man, who seemed to be the one in charge of them, let out a sigh.

"On top of receiving extensive treatment, and receiving a share of their meals, where's this backtalk coming from? Sorry about that. I'll also be sure to caution them."

The older one did seem to be relatively reliable.

I looked to the village chief, who was busy conversing with Norma-san.

With a pale face, he was making a desperate appeal.

"So the last attack was this morning? Then you'll be safe for a while more."

“Don’t be like that! Please defeat them as soon as possible. There are many villagers who are too scared to even sleep at night. They even lead along the goblins in the area, carry off the villagers, and… our casualties are already over forty!”
“We’ve only just arrived. I need to give the troops some rest. Please make preparations for a meal.”
“T-that can’t…”
“If they attack again, we’ll be the ones to deal with them! You just have to do as you’ve been ordered!”

Looking at Norma’s attitude, I did understand it was no good at this rate.

While a strict manner may be required to make people move, shouldn’t there be a better way to phrase things?

I looked at the village.

I did get the feeling that there were too few villagers.

Using my Skills, I found that quite a few of the houses were now uninhabited.

And…

“… This is bad. Novem, gather everyone up. I’ll go tell Clark-san.”

“What’s the matter, Lyle-sama?”

Novem tilted her head as she looked at me.

The ancestors within the Jewel were able to gain information through me.

The Second spoke.

『Hippogryph? Like hell. They freakin’ hid the big one.』

The Third was in agreement.

『Yes, if it was just a Hippogryph, I get the feeling it would work out one way or another…』

The Fourth spoke.

『They really do sell for quite a bit. But at this rate, you'll be tortured to death.』

The Fifth…

『Well, they are considered as a sort of boss of the Hippogryphs.』

The Sixth.

『Though they usually just take on the Hippogryphs as convenient henchmen.』

The Seventh voiced the name of that monster.

『I was a little uncertain of your victory up to know, but now it's quite clear. At this rate, you'll lose. I never thought… a Gryphon would be here.』

The head and wings of an eagle. The body of a lion.

Much larger than a Hippogryph, a ferocious monster.

A threat from the skies, and if they took along some Hippogryphs with them and launched an attack, a number of villages were fated to disappear.

In order to not stir up her fear, I spoke to Novem.

"I'll go make a report first. Please gather everyone together. If we're going to be entering a break now, then we'll have to park Porter in an appropriate place… I'll have to find a villager to talk to as well. I'll leave the negotiations in those areas to you."

Perhaps because I had left it to her, Novem formed a smile.

"Yes. Then me and Miranda-san will carry out negotiations. If we go with too many, it'll feel like we're threatening them."

(Right. Even if they're all women, if they have the numbers, it starts to look like coercion.)

"Sorry. Please do."

And in order to find Clark-san, I quickly walked away.

❼

Finding Clark-san issuing orders to his men, I decided to blatantly tell him the truth.

I wasn't an acquaintance of Norma-san's, and Clark-san did seem quite reliable.

Hearing the information I gave, his eyes opened wide.

We spoke in the back of a small private dwelling.

Of how I had Skills.

And of how I discovered a Gryphon with those Skills.

"Gryphon, you say… that's a foe to send the elites at. It isn't too great, but for a mismatched legion like ours…"

Clark-san's mortified face had turned pale.

I knew it was rude, but I decided to ask.

"About the aptitude of the captain and her knights, um…"

Clark-san shook his head.

"Since they are part of a knight brigade, they've all been properly trained. But all of them besides Captain Norma, me included, are lower in ability. I was wondering why we were sent with this formation, but I never thought it would be this… while I know it may be rude to ask, has your Skill ever been off?"

Clark-san's eyes were focused on my blue Jewel.

"… Never. There's definitely a Gryphon."

"I see. I did think this brigade would be somewhat reliable for the task at hand… while there's the possibility you're lying, it doesn't seem like the atmosphere for that. And there is something that comes to mind."

It seems Clark-san had found it suspicious from the start that they

were to go on a dispatch with these members.

Norma-san had been chosen as the commander, and it felt as if they had gathered up all the knights that were usually causing problems.

And…

“There was a rumor about it. That the economic difficulties would be solved if the overbloated number of nobles was cut down. I see… I did hear that some of those up there were letting the second and third sons take the house as of late, and that such a thing was difficult…”

I supported the man’s body, which looked like it would collapse.

I wasn’t too knowledgeable about the matters in Centralle, but it was obvious there was an underside to it.

The Fifth spoke in a low voice.

『The bastard… it’s quite likely he already knew about it.』

Bastard likely referred to Ralph-san.

The Seventh spoke.

『He purposely let his daughters listen in on the information of the expedition to entice them? Well, those imperial rats are quite skilled at that sort of thing. Erase Lyle and Marcus, and have Miranda return to welcome a groom as she’d fully finished her education, perhaps… Whatever the case, there’s little loss to him. If Lyle didn’t take it up, two would die. If Lyle accepted, and left Miranda with him, Lyle would die, and his daughter would have returned. It really feels like we’ve been rolling around on his hand.』

The Sixth seemed amazed.

『But the one who accepted the request was Lyle… it’s just that…』

For some reason, I got the impression the Sixth was giving a grin in the Jewel.

The Third laughed.

『He's really looking down on us. If he thinks this is enough to take our heads, he's way off.』

The Fourth was the same.

『This really is where we should get some huge brownie points, and return to Centralle in glory. Those capital dogs will rejoice! I mean, it's the party that took down a Gryphon! There's a possibility, you may have a peerage made for you! I wonder how many'll get promotions? I'm sure the capital's public finances will go into an even greater state of ruin!』

The Second was of the same opinion.

『If this number of people were to disappear for the sake of a single village, I'll bet there'll be many who'll celebrate… but you see, it really is fun seeing the pissed faces of guys like that!』

I wonder why.

The Ancestors all seemed to be quite happy.

Clark-san looked at my dubious expression, and likely thought I was pressing at his own faintness of heart.

He gave an apology.

"I'm sorry. I'll always be stuck an ordinary knight, but if I gave up here, I'll be too shamed to even call myself that. Lyle-kun, I won't force you. But if you're going to run, then please take along the women and children and…"

I smiled.

And I spoke.

"What are you talking about, Clark-san? This is your big chance."

"… Chance? No, Lyle-kun, I don't want to say it, but a Gryphon is an enemy a knight brigade with highly ranked ability is to take care of. I'm not even sure if Captain Norma reaches mid rank or not. We'll buy some time here, so you young'uns should…"

He was beckoning me to flee, but the ancestors were raising their

voices as well, so it was all too noisy.

From Second and up.

『Now then, first, let's go get the cooperation of the villagers. I thought this would be a good chance to teach Lyle about society, but this is quite interesting in itself…』
『If you seize hold of the troops, it'll be easier… well, if they don't obey, they can be used as monster bait. As long as you have more than half, and get the villagers on your side, it'll work out one way or another.』
『Lyle, how about I teach you about the glorious magic of money? It'll be quite a nice lesson to learn.』
『What's this… this thrilling sensation. Get a grasp of the terrain, station your troops… wait in ambush, or press forth ourselves…』
『It's a big one. One that, in our time, we would compete to see who would take its head first. I vote for going on the offense.』
『The head sure makes a good mount. If all goes well, you'll get to stuff its entire body. What's unfortunate is you don't have a place to show it off, I guess.』
(H-huh… none of them feel very heroic at all. A Gryphon's supposed to be formidable, right? And wait, it's stronger than the boss in the labyrinth, right?)

The Seventh seemed to only worry about the fact that we had nowhere to display it.

In the first place, the point he was stressing wasn't the important one.

"It'll be alright, Clark-san…"
『『『It's finally getting fun around here!!』』』

I think I was probably making quite a complex expression.

Clark-san looked to me with a pale face, for different reasons than before.

The Ancestors were rowdy, and the words I let out to put Clark-san at ease…

"Let's just have some fun with it."

Clark-san raised and lowered his head swiftly, as he nodded a number of times.

7 - Carpe Cardium

When we arrived at Johnny Village, what awaited us wasn't a Hippogryph, but a Gryphon.

A commander of Hippogryphs, it was a monster that would even take elite forces among knight brigades to deal with.

The expeditionary force hadn't the slightest idea that an enemy like that awaited us…

I was conversing with Clark-san about what was to come.

"Can I leave persuading Norma-san to you?"

What's important was the right to command.

According to the ancestors, it wasn't impossible for my party to deal with it by ourselves. But in that case, it would be just as planned for the Imperial Nobles, and no fun at all.

We were speaking in the recesses of a house, and Clark-san made a difficult expression.

"To put it bluntly, it'll be hard. I've never been stationed with her until this mission, and she's…"

Of whom I'd only ever heard bad rumors of, the female knight Norma.

I did see her form in battle, but I was able to clearly understand why her disposition caused her to be hated.

Her appearance was on the nicer side, so I'd like it if she calmed down a little, and behaved more like a commander.

Letting out a low voice, the Third…

『How about we give it to her straight?』

The Fifth was in agreement to that.

『An incompetent commander will put the entirety of the forces in danger. I don't see her as much of a lucky one either… how about we casually nudge her to a noble death in battle?』

This man's scary!

To Clark-san's strained face, I tried asking about the state of the knights and soldiers.

"Clark-san, if she were to learn of the existence of the Gryphon at this stage, how do you think Norma-san would move?"

The most troublesome course would be if she stirred up a panic, and fled.

In that case she would have no option left, but to be a traitor to the state.

Clark-san shook his head.

"She did look on a Hippogryph quite lightly. In the worst case, she'd run, and at best, she'd try to raise her name by taking it down… no, she does have quite a pragmatic side to her, so it's hard to determine. From my point of view, if we were able to run, I would."

All I understood was that we couldn't anticipate anything.

In that case, we'll have to prepare to take flight.

The serious ancestors gave a prompt judgement upon hearing Clark-san's words.

The Fourth spoke.

『Lyle, how about you snatch up the commanding authority.』

My eyes widened a little.

Seeing that action, Clark-san's body reacted in shock.

The fact that he was afraid of me stung in a strange way.

(If I could take it so easily, we wouldn't be going through such troubles…)

I'm an adventurer, and she's a knight.

Even if she didn't hate adventurers on the level of the Seventh, my name wasn't spread in Centralle at all.

The Second spoke.

『… Lyle, we're going to go speak to the village chief. Have Clark speak with Norma on your behalf. If she wants to run, then let her. Oy, it's your turn.』

Saying that, the one he left it to was the Fourth.

『It's at these times that you have to be gaudy with your spending… from the numbers… perhaps five hundred gold coins will be enough for the lot? It pains me that I don't know the current pricing of a Gryphon. If we asked Clark… no, let's palm it off at Centralle. I do feel they'll buy it at quite a nice price. Okay, Lyle…』

The Fourth seemed to be having fun. He liked saving up money, and gave off an image as if he hated spending it.

『… Pay out one gold for every goblin body. Also, orcs, and things of that level for five gold. Fifty gold per Hippogryph, and a hundred for the Gryphon!』

As rewards, they were quite extraordinary.

(He really is quite bold when he decides to spend it.)

As I thought that, the Fourth…

『The expected profit margin'll be over seven hundred!』

… But he was the same Fourth as always.

(This miser…)

I asked Clark-san to persuade Norma-san.

"Can you notify her of the presence of a Gryphon? If I'm held in doubt, I can prove the authenticity of my Skills. Also, I would like to have a word with her as well, so please gather together the knights."

Clark-san's expression was still as strained as ever.

"What are you thinking of? You're not just going to gather us all up, and attack in mass, right?"

He was quite anxious. So he thought I'd take charge, and order everyone to attack…

After being told that much, I decided to smile.

Hold confidence.

If possible, keep the other party in anxiety.

(Come to think of it, I haven't done something like this since Dalien…)

Directing a smile, I spoke to Clark-san.

"I will take the authority to lead. It's alright. When it all comes to an end, they'll still be the merits of you guys and the volunteer soldiers. You can hold some expectations for the reward for exterminating the Gryphon."

Hearing that, Clark-san's mouth opened and closed silently.

The Sixth spoke.

『Good! Sink in the finisher!』

I put my hand on his shoulder, and went on.

"It's alright. We'll be heading out in the best of conditions. I want to see the people of the palace rejoicing. The expeditionary legion they never thought to return came back, with a Gryphon in tow… Let's pass through that gate, and prance gallantly down the main street."

With his face still quite pale, it looked like his mouth would start frothing at any moment.

"No, the palace… even if you call it a triumphant return…"

I continued.

"Bringing trouble to the imperial nobles that tried to cut us off, and

achieving distinguished service for ourselves… how about it?”

When I made a serious face, Clark-san started to look troubled.

He was a relatively earnest person, so I’ll bet he has quite a bit to think over.

And he dropped his shoulders.

“… If you’re telling the truth, there’s little chance we’ll survive. But how do you plan to go about bringing down a Gryphon? Even if we were to prepare for it, we only have a few crossbows.”

Hearing he had brought along crossbows, the ancestors rejoiced.

The Second was…

『This knight is able. You should learn a little from him.』

He was likely referring to my own lack of preparations.

“I’ll show you. In front of everyone, that is.”

I parted from Clark-san, and walked towards the village head.

❼

When I looked around for the village chief, I found him issuing orders to the villagers.

Helping with the construction of the tents, he left the preparation of food to the other residents of the village.

They were all making dark expressions.

The Second spoke.

『A squadron of a hundred for a small village. On top of that, the villagers already lost a number close to forty… It isn’t strange for them to despair. What’s more, this expedition’s a gathering of deadbeats.』

(… Come to think of it, in the Second’s time, the territory just

consisted of a few settlements, and it was more of a village.)

The First cut open the path, and made the barbarians obey him.

The one who made the basis for the house in the truest sense was the Second.

Constantly compared to his father, constantly complained at, he still put its shape in order, and expanded the village.

The Third had said he was only proceeding with work according to the Second's plans.

I called out to the chief giving orders.

"Can I have a little of your time?"

"Eh? Ah, yes. What business do you have with me, dear knight?"

Hearing myself called a knight, I smiled.

"I'm an adventurer. I accepted a request from one of the knights participating, and that's why I'm here. With that being the case, would you still be willing to listen to me?"

The chief made a reluctant face.

He must be busy.

But I can't just pull back here.

I took out a small bag of silver coins from my breast-pocket, and handed it to him.

Inspecting the contents, he told a nearby youth that he'd be leaving for a little, and took to listening to my words.

(But all I did was hand over some money.)

The Fourth spoke.

『The power of money is a grand one. Well, if you think of the future of this village, it will be rough if they don't have as much saved up as possible.』

And after the chief took me to a place we could talk alone, I confirmed the situation.

“When we were dispatched from Centralle, we were told that the monster we would be dealing with was a Hippogryph. Is there any mistake in that?”

The chief opened his eyes.

“That can’t be! I made sure to properly write out the name ‘Gryphon’! Within the village, there were many who saw its form in the nearby forest! Why was something like that mistaken…”

According to him, the state-appointed Governer had run away, and had yet to return.

Truly, hearing about a Gryphon was something to make one want to flee.

“… Will you run as well? Will your army abandon this village as well?”

The chief looked at me with a ghastly expression.

But I spoke with a smile.

“No. We’ll take care of it. It’s just that there’s something I’ve been concerned about… that captain. She’s the female knight from before, but she’s under the impression that even if casualties arise, it’s fine as long as the matter’s resolved. It pains my heart to see any more deaths in this village, so that’s where you come in.”

“M-me?”

“I’ll have you cooperate, chief. It’s alright. We’ll protect the village, and defeat the Gryphon. That’s all there is to it. But she isn’t fit to lead this mission.”

“… So what needs you from us? And if the higher-ups were to learn of such a thing…”

By higher-ups, he likely meant the governor, and those in charge of this area.

Inviting in the rage of Centralle, and based on the persons involved… the village may even be laid waste to by the knights. It appears the village chief was fearful of such a thing.

“Please rest at ease. I’ve already come to an agreement with the adjutant. If we find opposition, the Captain will be a noble loss in the battle to come.”

Saying it myself left quite a bad taste in my mouth.

And the chief looked at me.

“… What is your collateral? Doing this much, if you’re to fail…”

Well, if I fail, I die, but my greatest goal is…

What floated in my head was Ralph-san’s face.

I was sure he was an earnest father, but it seems he was quite a cheat.

Thinking back, he was a person who’d lived long as an imperial noble.

“There’s a man I’m finding a little difficulty in forgiving. He’s got a nice place in Centralle, and giving him a spot of pain is my current objective.”

“W-what?”

His expression said that he kinda understood, and kinda didn’t. But I began to ask my favor of him regardless.

(Somehow, I’m gradually starting to hate learning about society.)

After the preparations finished as per my ancestors’ words, I headed back to Novem and the others.

❼

… The house Norma was taking a break in.

It was a vacant one that had lost its owner. There, Clark was being

reprimanded by Norma.

“Gryphon, you say? Even fools should learn to think carefully sometimes! We’ve come here on royal orders to subjugate a Hippogryph. Yet you listened to the words of that dubious adventurer so easily… this is why you can never get a promotion!”

While being rebuked by a female knight younger than himself, Clark contained himself, and continued his explanation.

“But it’s strange, no matter how you look at it. That adventurer does possess a Skill, and he said it was alright if he proved it… You should be well aware of how great a meaning revealing one’s Skill has, not just to adventurers, but to Knights as well.”

Lyle proving his Skill meant that he would be teaching others what he was capable of.

Teaching such a thing to others held high risk, even if one wasn’t an adventurer.

Perhaps finally noticing that, Norma made a questionable expression.

“Even in the case there really is a Gryphon, that is separate from our mission. We will pull back at once! Bring that adventurer over! If he can prove his Skill, we’ll begin the preparations for retreat immediately!”

To Norma, she wanted merits, but she valued her own life.

If she sensed the danger, she was set to withdraw.

(If that cowardice of hers only showed itself a little bit more during the preparations…)

Clark lamented, but he did begin explaining what would happen if they retreated.

“If we run away like this, we will be named as cowards, and will be unable to live on as knights. Even if we have definite proof of a Gryphon’s existence, we’ll always be condemned for having abandoned post. Also, you should be aware of the recent rumors,

right?”

“Rumors? What are you on about?”

It seems Norma truly did not know.

Clark remembered.

(Ah, dammit. This girl… she’s quite oblivious, even to her own colleagues.)

She was too rushed to attain her own success that she saw all around her as enemies. In truth, Norma had very few she could call allies.

No, perhaps it was best to say she had none.

By repeatedly snatching away feat after feat, she was a female knight who reached her position at a young age.

Everyone around her was an enemy.

(I see. So that’s why she was chosen. Not that I can say much, having been chosen as the aide to such a person.)

A depressed Clark began to explain the rumors circulating around the palace.

Of how the nobles and knights had grown too great in number.

Of how, for that sake, there was a need to cut down on numbers.

That the participants for such a plan were none other than their own squadron.

“So even if there really is a Gryphon, there’s a high possibility we’ll still be criticized, and our ranks will drop. With a dishonor that great on our backs, living on as a knight would be…”

Hearing that, Norma shouted out.

“W-what is the meaning of this!? Then why!? Why was I chosen!?”

Seeing Norma’s panic, Clark spoke.

“Please calm down! Right now, we should be thinking of just how we’re going to attain victory in this…”

“Victory!? Are you a fool!? With a Gryphon as our opponent, then not a decurion such as me, they’d send a centurion… no, a legatus! As if I could calm down in a situation like this…”

Seeing her disarray, Clark thought her less fitting of the commanding position than anyone he had served under before.

At the same time, it was quite clear that if he fought under her, they would face defeat.

If looked at as a single knight she was skilled.

If she had paid a little more mind to her surroundings, then perhaps centurion or legatus status was possible for her.

There…

“Caption! Vice-captain! The town’s residents have gathered! An adventurer a guy called Marcus hired told them to go to the plaza! Also, those villagers are saying it wasn’t a Hippogryph, but a Gryphon that they saw… just what is going on!?”

To the knight that asked if he should subdue them, Clark shook his head.

Looking at the confused and young knight, he spoke.

“Captain, we should go as well. It looks like everyone’s gathering up.”

Whatever the case, there was nowhere to run.

The probability that an army under his lead could win was low.

(So I’ll have to bet on the boy…)

And as always, Clark worried…

Before the residents lined up in the plaza, I gave an address.

No, it's not like I wanted to do it.

But I let out a loud voice from my stomach, and followed after the ancestors.

The one in charge was the Sixth.

He gathered the residents, and appealed that their assistance was essential.

But even if it was for their sakes as well, it's not like they were all eager to do it.

So there, the Sixth told me to do as he said.

『Good, now there Lyle, turn to look at the children! Are you alright with the lives you're giving these children? Your own parents and grandparents would look upon you with shame!』

I followed the Sixth's delighted instruction.

"Will you show your children such miserable sights? Do you want your parents and grandparents in heaven to laugh at you as cowards who turned tail from the monsters!? Do you want to be despised as the ones who didn't even try to do what you could!?"

I used various gestures, and wore all of the most attractive armor pieces we had among us as I shouted while standing atop Porter.

The villagers raised their voices.

"T-there's no way we could fight something like that!"
"Right! No matter how painful it may be, the power to fight them is… isn't that why we called over you knights in the first place!?"
"Even the governor turned tail! You guys will be soon to follow, I'll bet!"

The surrounding knights and soldiers gathered, hearing the villagers' voices.

Because they hadn't learned of the Gryphon until now, there were even some hurriedly making the preparations to run away.

I think it's too late for that, you know. Also, if they did end up running, I doubt any decent life awaited them.

If they fled to Centralle, I wonder just where they planned to go.

I pulled my sabre, and pointed its tip at the sky before using magic.

In order to make it flashier, I made use of the First's【Limit Burst】.

In order to pull off that display, I had purposely cleared a space in the plaza beforehand.

And that's where I directed it.

"Thunder Clap."

The sky had been cloudy, and thunder resounded, as lightning fell on the open space.

A violent sound echoed through the area, and among the townsfolk, there were some who had fallen to the ground in fear.

(T-that scared them, right? And wait, was there really a need to go that far?)

I hung my sabre against my shoulder to make sure they didn't notice my anxiety, and spoke disinterestedly.

"It'll be hell if you run. It'll be hell if you remain. Then… you've no choice but to fight."

The form of the Sixth giving a wide grin as he surveyed the area floated in my head.

『The knights've all gathered. You've finished the opening act. Lyle, now's the time.』

I gave my address in repetition of the Sixth.

"Centralle… the palace has abandoned us, and now, there's no path left to us but to be crushed here, or become enemies of the state. Does it not irritate you? The satisfied faces those guys up there waiting for our demises will make when they hear of our annihilation? If we survive, we'll be ridiculed as cowards, and if we run, you'll be

disgraces as knights. It doesn't matter if you're just a hired soldier. You'll always be sneered at and scorned… are you all really fine with that?"

All of their eyes were gathered on me.

With my flashy use of magic, there were even some looking at me with fearful eyes.

I wasn't playing the foolish son as I had in Dalien.

Right now, I was giving an address as Lyle.

Those cut out for the bottom.

Those who had fallen to their pitiful states.

There were various gathered, but they were all making the expressions of people who had given up.

"… If we return here, the castle will have us cut down. They'll put out quite a just cause, and we'll be killed. And they'll surely rejoice. But in that case, wouldn't you rather see their bitter faces?"

Someone raised a voice.

"Bitter… you can't mean…"

I continued.

"Defeat the Gryphon. Save the village. Do it all, and make a triumphant march back to the capital! We'll be famous in a single bound. There's no way those nobles in the palace can go about refusing to reward the heroes who slew the Gryphon. The troubadours will surely sing of us on the capital streets. Perhaps we'll be sung of throughout the country. Return as heroes, and stand before them with pride! Isn't it the greatest revenge!? Get money handed to you! Get status handed to you! Get your hands on… everything!"

Among the townsfolk, a few youngsters stood.

And out of nowhere, a voice came.

“I-I’ll do it! I’ll get my hands on it all! As if I’d let it end in a place like this!”

And another person or two stood up.

When their numbers became numerous, the knights and soldiers began to stand as well.

From atop Porter, I could see Captain Norma, and Vice-captain Clark-san looking at me.

“It’s a once-in-a-lifetime victory. The heroes who slayed the Gryphon. Your families will pass down the legend! … Win this battle, and lay hands on everything!”

Many stood, and let out their voices.

“Do you want money!?”
“””YEAH!!”””

“Do you want status!?”
“””YEAH!!”””

“Do you want fame!?”
“””YEAH!!”””

“Then fight for it! I will make you all emerge victorious!!”

The villagers, the knights, the soldiers cried out, and broke into applause.

Of course…

『Yeah~ as I thought, it’s at times like these that hired applauders are oh so important.』

The Third gave a spoiler.

The first ones to stand and endorse it were ones we had prepared ourselves.

The Sixth spoke.

『It’s because preparations are important. If they were just going to

be surprised, seeing his magic, it wouldn't be any fun after that.』

While that may be true, I get the feeling something's wrong here.

And the Fifth saw that Norma-san and Clark-san were looking at me, so he called out.

『Now then, if you've seized their hearts, next comes the coins.』

Coins… profits. Meaning money.

❼

After the address, I had the chief set up a desk we had prepared before hand.

And Miranda-san carried over a box, and turned out its contents.

Inside, was the five hundred gold coins I had prepared, piled up like a mountain.

Around, in order to make sure it wasn't stole, I had Aria, Marcus-san, and Breid-san as well as the three we had saved stationed.

Novem and Monica were filling out paperwork.

Shannon was carrying around a signboard Monica had drawn up.

"I-it's heavy, so hurry up…"

"You really don't have any stamina, do you?"

I was mildly taken aback by a pouting Shannon as I spoke to all.

"If you fight under my command, then I'll put out one gold coin per monster defeated! There's quite a number here, right? To those leading larger forces, there'll be a separate reward. The leader of the party that takes out the most will get yet another grant."

On Shannon's board… First place, ten gold. Second place, eight gold. Third place, five gold… was written.

"Goblins count for one gold! Orcs and ogres for five!"

Hearing that, the knights and soldiers gulped as they looked at the mountain of gold.

And the civilians too…

“As long as you aid me, there will be a reward. Woman are also warmly welcomed. Cooking and miscellaneous jobs, there’s a mountain of things to do.”

Some stood excitedly.

The Second spoke.

『As I thought, it really is different when there’s a reward in store.』

The Fifth spoke.

『It’s because a reward you can see with your own eyes is just that important. Even if one’ll benefit as a result either way, there’s a clear difference in motivation.』

Seeing their forms, I experienced once more my own naïve perception of the world.

To me, it was a sum I could earn at once, but there were plenty of people who could barely ever lay hands on it.

I couldn’t speak ill of the people entranced by the gold before their eyes.

But I did understand what the ancestors were trying to tell me.

“We’ve written up contracts. The payments will be dealt with reliably. Even if I’m to tell a lie, you can legally make a claim afterwards.”

There, a single knight raised a hand.

“U-um… letters are a little beyond me…”

I spoke.

“All forms are the same. Confirm the details with those that can read. All those that want to enter into a contract, please line up.”

While Miranda-san was putting away the gold coins, Clark came to

stand before me.

“Lyle-kun… do you have a moment?”

Behind him was Norma-san.

All gazes were directed at her.

❼

Borrowing the village chief’s house, I talked alone with the two of them.

Pertaining to this time’s Gryphon subjugation.

But it was different to what I had expected.

The Seventh seemed fed up.

『What a girl. Well, it’s more decent than having her go on a rampage. Saves us some effort.』

Personally, I thought it would be fine if Norma-san didn’t raise a hand, but on the other hand, here I was feeling oh-so-tired.

On the other side of the table, Norma-san was making quite a serious expression.

“To summarize, the right to command still falls to me at the end… the results are also mine.”

She was negotiating with a serious face, but from the start, I didn’t want any glory in Centralle. It would just get in the way.

If Norma-san was no good, I planned to have Clark-san take up all the results when he returned.

“Captain, that phrasing is…”

When Clark-san tried to step in, Norma-san burst out.

“It’s an important matter! We’re talking about the achievement of having slain a Gryphon here! On top of him doing it for us on his

own, if he fails, it'll be of his own judgement. There isn't a single demerit to me!"

If you do look at it realistically, there really is little demerit to her.

When it comes to not being able to run away, Norma-san was in the same boat.

But even if she fought, failed, and died, she would be a brave and noble warrior who threw down her life.

The Fifth spoke.

『… I guess I can at least evaluate her on her swift ability to change her thoughts, and to not mull over the details. It's good that she won't be getting in the way, at least.』

I nodded.

"As long as you agree to abide all of my orders, then all the achievements can be yours. However, I'll be reporting the work of those that participated as well. If I don't, you understand what will happen, right? Every person here will become your enemy."

She did understand, as Norma-san began to nod.

"I-I know. I'll write of how everyone performed greatly on the report! If that's what's needed for me to get a promotion, then…"

I ignored Norma-san, as she hung her head and gave a dark smile, as I turned to Clark-san.

"Are you alright with that as well, Clark-san? Personally, I would like if you followed my command."

Letting out a sigh, Clark-san shook his head.

"If I said I didn't accept your command at this point, then all the troops, Captain and all, will come for my head. It's just that, I'm fine with just earning for the part I play. If the reports are to hold truthful, I don't mind listening to you."

Hearing that, Norma-san laughed.

“Fool. Honesty never pays. A textbook definition right here.”

Clark-san whispered sorrowfully.

“Right. Perhaps.”

And like that, we cleaned up the issues with management, and I had work to do, so I left.

(Honest, is it…)

Clark-san accepted the bribe.

That’s how the system worked, but he wasn’t just a stubbornly honest man.

He wasn’t one I could bring myself to hate, though.

(I wonder why he was chosen for this expeditionary force.)

I could only think over it in wonder.

Perhaps the imperials had thought that anyone would do.

❼

When I returned to Novem’s side, it seems that some sort of problem had arisen.

While Novem was making a troubled face, by her side, Monica was finishing up one contract after another.

The one she was dealing with was a child.

“I want to fight! Dad already kicked the bucket, and there’s only mom left, so if I don’t fight, then…”

The young boy with short brown hair was quite unkempt.

Age-wise, I doubt he had even reached ten.

While she was reliable, I guess even Novem would be troubled.

“You’re still quite young, so how about assisting with the tasks in the

village? Also, even if you call it fighting…”

The reason she was bewildered was likely because the one she was dealing with was quite serious.

With an earnest expression, he frantically offered his complaints.

“Yeah, no, that age is impossible.”

Saying that, I tried to draw closer, but the Third stopped me in a tone besides his usual cheerful one.

『… He sure resembles brother.』

Perhaps I should call him serious, or solemn.

There was some sadness mixed in, and the Second also…

『Identical. The voice, that appearance… and, that straightforwardness of his.』

The Second’s tone held some nostalgia.

When I mulled over what to do, the Second spoke.

『Hey, Lyle… just a little is fine. Really, just a small bit, alright? Can you try looking over that child a bit?』

On the voice the Second wrung out of himself, I found myself unable to refuse.

8 - The Second's Memory

Inside the Jewel.

There, a meeting was being conducted by the ancestors.

The Fourth took lead.

『Well then, it's been decided Johnny Village will be a defensive battle.』

The Sixth seemed irritated.

『If only we had more usable troops, we could send them into the forest!』

The Seventh also seemed just as irritated.

『Kuh, I guess the Second and Third have more experience commanding these small numbers. We should listen to them here.』

The Fifth spoke.

『So next is how we plan on intercepting them. If we had a few more crossbows, we could deploy the villagers in wait. Even if they don't have the skill, have one load the crossbow, and hand it over to the next. Fire, and rotate…』

The Third sounded quite happy.

『We did have Lyle circle around the village, so if we just tinker a little with it, and harden our defenses, it should be plenty. If a Hippogryph or Gryphon enters the village, then just bind it, and gang up!』

With humans as their livestock, the Hippogryphs would likely attack.

Won't they run? I thought that, but according the ancestors, 'Gryphons and their kin have an excessive amount of pride.'

I won't say they aren't clever, but even if they knew they would lose, they wouldn't stop launching attacks.

The really were an ill-natured opponent.

The Fourth looked at the image floating over the round table.

It came from within my head, a three dimensional map of the village.

『I guess the weak points are here, and here? Station some knights, and have the crossbows handled in two-man teams. I'd appreciate a shield position too.』

The numbers we could move were close to one hundred and seventy.

It didn't reach two hundred, but it was better than the one hundred and ten we had at the start.

The Second spoke.

『Lyle will take command. His group will take care of the monsters penetrating into the village. Station Aria and Miranda at places lacking in combat potential. Novem will be charged with healing, so have her stationed in the center of the village. Porter and Clara are probably fine there as well.』

I asked the Second.

"What should we do about Monica and Shannon?"

He took up a difficult face.

The reason was Monica's appearance.

It was a maid garment, or perhaps a dress that resembled one.

Even if we knew she was strong, causing confusion from our own troops on the battlefield wasn't a good thing.

『… Women and children… yeah, have her guard them, and the elderly. Shannon'll be assisting Novem by her side. If we had more of those arrows on hand, it'd be easier though.』

The arrows we purchased in Arumsaas were ones with exploding weights fastened to their ends. If the enemy was too far, it was difficult to set aim.

But if it hit, something on the level of a goblin was taken care of in a single shot.

If hit in the right place, Orcs were also killed off in one blow.

The Third looked at me.

『Looks like we'll have to have Lyle use them. They're just leftovers of what he used before, but they'll be quite useful against a Hippogryph. A Gryphon'd be hard, mind you.』

The Third explained that a Gryphon wouldn't even falter from such an explosion.

The Seventh spoke.

『If it's a Gryphon, it'll be easier if you can get on its back.』

The Sixth was of the same opinion.

『When you're fighting ones stronger than yourself, there are methods like that to use. While there isn't an overwhelming gap in strength between one and the current Lyle, it'll be hell to hit it with magic… Okay, if it seems impossible, we're going with that.』

"That? What's wrong with binding its movement, and having everyone beat it black and blue? There are some magics I know like that."

The Sixth stared at me reproachfully.

『You're no fun at all.』

No, I'm not in it for fun.

And as the conference proceeded like that, the Third and others quarreled with zeal.

Even when I tried calling out to them.

『That's why I'm saying it's no good unless you station that Norma as well! If you don't use all the pieces you can, there's no point!』
『That incompetent? We'll likely have some after money, so if possible, let's leave it in the center. Have Monica guard it with the

rest.』
『No, she's somewhat competent, I tells ya'. While she has her deficiencies, she did hand over command to Lyle immediately. Because on top of surviving, it gave her the best possible circumstance. Also, if you look at her as a knight, she can likely take care of any goblin or orc.』
『Purposely let them through, set a trap, and let them burn… I'd like a few more set-ups scattered around.』
『… If we had the Walt House's elite here, they'd march out and end it within the day. Ah, yep, let's set some traps where we're short on hands. If you're reinforcing the structures, keep them easy to fight on…』

Grinning, and sometimes raging up as they drew up a plan. My ancestors.

We already proceeded talks on reinforcing the village, and it felt as if we were building up a fortress for battle.

And all I could do was watch.

To me, the Second called out.

『They sure are having fun over there. Are you bored, Lyle?』

Hearing that, I shook my head.

"No, I have to properly listen to it all. It may be for my sake in times to come."

The Second grabbed me by the collar, and dragged me over to his room.

『Oy, I'm borrowing Lyle for a bit.』

The Second addressed that to the remaining five, and the one to respond was the Fourth.

He stared intently at the table, and waved his hand to dismiss us.

『Yeah, go do what you will. We'll be continuing over here.』

"Eh? Wait!?"

Even with my resistance, the Second continued to pull at me, and dragged me through the door.

❼

The ancestors' rooms within the Jewel were all stuffed full of those ancestors' memories.

To the First, it was a small village.

To the Second, the scenery of a village beginning to develop spread out.

There were villagers doing work on it, but their forms were nothing more than projections. It wasn't possible to touch them.

The memories of the owner of the room.

"What is it? Are you thinking of throwing me into real battle here like the First? Well, if you have a Gryphon for me to fight, I'll gratefully accept it."

As I said that, the Second shook his head horizontally.

『That sounds nice as well, but you already won against a dragon subspecies. Fighting a Gryphon at this point won't get you anywhere. The only thing annoying about them is their flight.』

Situated in quite a remote region, the Walt House had a long history of fighting against Monsters.

The First carried around that huge lunk of a sword to fight, and the Second was properly trained as the successor to combat Monsters. They were all experienced.

It was unthinkable for any of them to never have gone out like the knights back at Centralle.

"Then what is it? … It's raining?"

As we walked forward, the sky began to cloud over.

When the rain began to touch the soil, the villagers who had been working up to then disappeared.

Even if I stepped in the puddles, water didn't splash up.

It was a little wondrous.

And within the heavy rain, I definitely witnessed that scenery.

"Eh, um… blood is…"

What spread on the ground alongside the rain, was crimson blood.

What was before the Second's eyes, was one with his same form on his knees, with a child clutched in his arms.

Next to them, a smaller child was crying his heart out…

"Is that the Third? Then the one you're holding is…"

『My oldest son.』

Just as the second's tears fell, the young boy next to him wept.

The blood flowing from the boy in his arms didn't stop.

Nearby, was the form of a monster pierced by arrows.

A horned rabbit.

The scene changed.

Perhaps it was summer this time.

The sunlight was strong, and yet, I didn't feel the heat.

The Second was teaching a child how to use a bow.

『Hey, do your best.』

『Yeah~!』

The child pulled the miniature bow with all his might, and let loose practice arrows. It was the one the Second had been embracing before, the eldest son.

Nearby, the small Third was staring absentmindedly at his brother.

Even from a young age, he held that sort of whimsical air.

The boy released an arrow, and burst into joy when he hit the target.

『I did it! I did it, father!』

『Nice job! As expected of a Walt man. Become strong, and get to be a lord who can protect his people.』

『Yeah!』

The image of the Second's eldest son turned gray, and time stopped there.

I looked at the Second.

『… He was a good kid. Unlike me, he was bright, and honest. The fief liked him quite a lot. They hated me, but I was sure that that child would grow to be loved by the people. Since I was blessed with a second son, I planned on giving Sleigh some land, and having him start a branch family. He was quite laid back, but he liked books and knowledge… that's why I thought I would have him… support【Dewey】alongside me.』

Seeing the boy, I noticed.

Brown and unkempt hair.

It was the boy that wanted Novem to allow him to fight at Johnny Village. I think his name was【Luka】, but they were definitely reminiscent.

『Within the heavy rain. A monster appeared in the fields. He grabbed his bow, and ran out. I wouldn't have cared that much if the fields were ruined a little. He could have called me over… In order to protect Sleigh, who followed along, he went up front.』

I didn't know what I should say.

The Second continued.

『I couldn't protect him. I'm just the same as the First. Selfish. But

please do a little for that child… I don't want to see that boy die again. It can only be for a little, but please watch over him.』

"… If it's in a scope I'm capable of."

When I said that, the Second let out a powerless laugh.

『Sorry, Lyle. I guess I can't talk bad about my old man anymore.』

And the images cut off.

We were in a mansion.

The one sleeping atop the bed was a weathered and weakened First Generation.

Beside【Basil Walt】, sat an aging woman. Her appearance was well kept, and I could understand it in an instant.

(So that person's the First's wife.)

The Second stood close to the bed. But he seemed extremely worn out.

The First forced out his own voice.

『… I'm sorry for everything, Crassel.』

After saying that, he closed his eyes.

The Second clenched his fist, and began to weep where he stood.

The aged woman spoke to him.

『You don't have to blame yourself anymore. There may be those that criticize you, but you're doing a splendid job. This man was just as awkward as you, and that's why…』

The aged woman let out her tears.

The Second opened his mouth.

『… I… wanted to grow up to be like him. Strong, and loved… but I could never catch up in the slightest. I could never protect anything…』

The Second's crumpling figure.

There, the surrounding scenery changed to him practicing his Skill.

The Second scratched his face with a finger.

『… I didn't really want to show it. It's embarrassing, you know.』

"I don't really find it embarrassing. Also, if you weren't there, the Third would…"

For better or worse, the Third was a shoddy individual.

He advanced the territory by the Second's plan, and never did anything unnecessary.

Even so, his name was carved into the history of the Bahnseim Kingdom. What's to become of the world.

『… It's because he never does anything pointless. He never practiced with the bow, and only swung around a sword. Thinking back now, perhaps that was for the best, but looking at him, I couldn't help but be worried.』

The Second laughed.

Then he looked at me with a serious expression.

『Also, I wanted to show it to you. That's all I am… Hey, Lyle…』

"Yes?"

『… Don't you think it's alright to use my Skill already?』

It felt like my heart was grasped for a moment. And I forcefully expelled my consciousness from within the Jewel to my body.

❼

When I opened my eyes, it seemed that night was coming to its end.

In the house we were staying at, its female owner was away.

“Ah, it looks like I’ve woken you up.”

The woman was preparing a meal, and an energetic young boy ran into the house.

“Ah, Lyle-sama woke up! I’ll have to let Novem-neechan know.”

Luka…

The boy that resembled the Second’s eldest had come with firewood in hand.

When I looked around, I saw that Shannon and Aria were asleep.

Clara and Novem were on watch, and it seems that Miranda-san was already awake.

Behind the boy stood Monica.

“Mum, it’s amazing. This maid cut the wood, bang bang bang, and piled up a mountain. Looks like we’ll be fine for a while.”

The woman… Luka’s mother spoke in a tired tone.

“We’ll have to let them dry, so we won’t be able to use them for a while. Also, did you say your thanks? Ah, thank you for that.”

“I did say it!”

Monica nodded.

“Yes. I did receive his thanks.”

And she took some fleeting glances at me.

(I can understand what she wants me to say, but I’m definitely not saying it.)

To Luka’s mother, lowering her head to Monica, I scratched my head, and spoke.

“Ah, you don’t have to offer gratitude to that one. She’s an automaton.”

Both Luka and his mother stared blankly.

It seems that they didn't understand anything from the word automaton. Looks like I failed.

There, Monica made a sad expression.

"It's fine, the two of you. A person like that is my master, but I'm doing my best to serve him."

I received the two of their chastising glances, and glared at Monica.

"Hey, that one was unfair!"

Outside the perception of mother and child, Monica was sticking out her tongue.

"I haven't said a single lie."

When she made a regretful face, Luka closed in on me.

"Lyle-sama, you have to properly give your thanks. It's definitely no good to say something like that."

By the admonishing of a young boy, I was led to show gratitude to Monica.

Monica was giving a radiant smile, but whenever they weren't watching her, her smile would warp into one much more indecent.

(This bitch…)

While stomaching it, I figured that I couldn't speak as per usual before the two taking care of us at the moment.

I apologized.

"Thanks for everything, Monica… is that alright?"

When I glared at her, Monica spoke with a triumphant face.

"You really aren't an honest master. Oh, I have to finish the preparations for breakfast. It looks like today will be a busy one."

Saying that, Monica began to assist Luka's mother in high spirits.

Luka himself began to pull on my arm.

“Lyle-sama, what should I help with today!?”

“Today, huh? Today is… please lead me around the village. There were some places I wasn’t able to see yesterday.”

“Again? When is it that you’ll let me fight?”

He kept insisting he had to participate no matter what, but we had him contribute by assisting my work. On top of showing me around the village, I needed a local to ask various things about the place.

He acted like this, but Luka’s father was killed by a Hippogryph.

In Johnny Village, where people who hadn’t had any family members killed off were the minority, it wasn’t a rare story at all.

“When we get some free time, I’ll teach you some things. Before that, we’ll have to prepare. After eating, we’ll have another meeting at once.”

“Meeting? You’re going to be talking again?”

I patted his head.

“It’s an important step. Now then, I guess I’ll wake Shannon. I want to let Aria sleep a little longer.”

Luka looked at Shannon.

She had a blanket draped over her, but from the shape of it, one could tell she was asleep with her legs spread wide apart. Aria was similarly sleeping quite stretched out.

“… Lyle-sama, that Shannon girl’s no good. She immediately runs away from work.”

I nodded.

”Yeah, I know. But it’s alright. As long as Novem’s nearby, she won’t even think of running.”

Luka spoke.

“As I thought, that neechan’s amazing. The old blacksmith instantly

took to her. Even when he's a stubborn dwarf, he said he'd cooperate with her! The village adults were all surprised."

I spoke.

"As expected of Novem. Now then, let's finish the preparations quickly."

"Yeah!"

Watching her cheerful son, Luka's mother seemed a little relieved.

The voice I heard from the Jewel was the Third's.

『… Yep, as I thought, he really resembles brother.』

His voice seemed a little happy, yet somewhat mournful.

Having seen the memory, I could slightly understand his sentiment.

(… I'll have to change gears.)

With that in mind, I enlisted Luka's assistance in waking Shannon.

9 - Hippogryph

In the central station of the village, I deployed Porter's Shield to form a roof.

On the paper laid over the table, a simple map had been drawn.

And there, I confirmed where the defenses would be stationed, and the traps be set.

I scribbled over the map, and filled in the placement and assortment of the new traps.

After breakfast, I found Miranda-san close to me.

Next to me, Luka looked over my work.

Seeing the map, the village chief was quite surprised. But Clark-san's amazement was the greater of the two.

"Lyle-kun, you thought this up in a single night?"

The chief was…

"Defenses and trap placement… no, but with these numbers…"

He was thinking over whether the positioning I had scribbled down was possible.

Seeing that, Norma-san spoke to me.

"What are you all so surprised about? Anyone could have thought up that one. If it were me, I'd add on a trap here, and here, and fortify defenses here."

She said that simply brimming with confidence, but hearing that, the Second burst into laughter.

『What's with this girl. Totes incompetent.』

The Third also gave a large laugh.

『Yeah, I'll bet anyone could have drafted it out. But putting it to practice is a different problem.』

To Norma-san, Clark-san shook his head, and explained.

"Captain, we're too shorthanded for that. At the very least, we have to finish these preparations in the next few days. In that time, I'm sure a Hippogryph will launch an attack or two, so we have to finish the traps and constructions before the Gryphon decides to show its face."

The village chief looked at Norma-san with an unpleasant face.

"… It truly would be troublesome if you stationed a trap there. Even if you're to revert it to normal later, there's a house there."

Norma-san took a step back. She was making an irritated expression.

(Well, she was thinking of laying more traps at least.)

The Fourth spoke.

『While it does look like there was some thought behind her placements, this is the limit.』

The Fifth urged me to issue the next orders.

『Lyle, don't just say silent, proceed things forward already. From here on's a battle against time.』

I ended up issuing orders to the gathered faces.

"Well then, Norma-san, you'll be on standby here. If you send someone running to report to me, I'll issue further orders. Clark-san, please continue to train the soldiers. Chief, lead the structure reinforcement. Miranda-san…"

Miranda-san gave a reply, saying she already knew.

"Setting the traps, right? I think I can do it, but based on the necessary size, I'll only be able to throw out orders for now. I have my tools, but preparations will take a day."

I did take that into consideration, and it wasn't a problem.

"Traps will be set on the second day… just make sure you finish up before the Gryphon appears."

It would likely use a Hippogryph to attack the village first.

A Hippogryph would probably come leading some monsters soon.

This mental attack to drive us against the wall bit by bit made me think of the beast as quite an unlikable fellow.

Of course, if it were a dragon, Johnny Village would be long gone by now.

Perhaps the Gryphon wasn't moving around itself because it was storing up power.

"I'll have Novem and Clara help out with reinforcement as well. Monica will be charged with food rations, let's have her on rotation between cooking and break. Any opinions on the matter?"

I looked over those gathered, and one of the knights timidly posed a question.

"Ah, no… well… whose orders should we be following?"

They took some fleeting glances at Norma, but I had to make a clear declaration.

"As representative commander, I will be giving the orders. Report to me."

The knight nodded, and seemed a little relieved.

The Sixth spoke.

『… Could it be this one's no good as a commander?』

The Seventh was of the same opinion.

『Well, she's proficient in a different way. It's just that, it doesn't seem she's putting that to much use.』

It would likely be much easier to get promoted if she went about it a

different way…

While thinking that, I continued to answer questions.

There were some questions I cared not for at all, and some that indicated their questioners didn't understand what was going on in the slightest.

And looking at the meeting, the Second spoke.

『Uwah… now I'm worried.』

While he was speaking of his worries, I wonder why it is he sounds so happy? That's all I could think of the Second's bright tone.

❼

Borrowing a horse, I used my Skills to check the entirety of the village.

I observed the villagers proceeding with their work, and came in to resolve a problem whenever it surfaced. That's the style with which I went about it.

I could have just waited for reports in the center, but since we had just begun to move, there was quite an amount of trouble.

Confirming a quarrel, I urged the horse to run towards the scene.

Outside the wall constructed of thick logs, a trench was dug to create a tactical height advantage.

The dug up earth was brought to the inside of the walls to serve as fortification.

It was power-related work, but the cause of the argument was Novem.

Seeing her magic, a villager was acting up.

"If you can do that, then why won't you do the whole thing!? We're in a hurry here, so that's the least you could do!"

A slender man wearing tattered clothing was the one shouting out, and the surrounding people were looking on with tired eyes.

Novem explained.

“As I was saying, I won’t be able to use up all my Mana here. After this, I have to be put on standby for healing, so I have to conserve…”

“So you plan on having it easy all by yourself!?”

Seeing the man making a racket, I couldn’t see him as anyone decent.

There, a man of small build walked up.

Oh, that’s a gnome, is it not?

“Hey, you haven’t even been working for a while, so how about you cut with the noise, and pick up your shovel? Also, if you don’t work, I doubt you’ll receive any pay for it.”

The small gnome was one hundred and fifty centimeters, fully grown, and tall for his race. The slender man looked at the gnome, and let out a loud voice.

“Don’t screw with me! You damn gnome midgets should just shut up and get to work! Thinking of standing up to us human race now, are ya!? As long as this woman can end the job quickly, then my pay is…”

To the man letting his saliva fly as he shouted, I approached with my horse.

“No, I doubt you’ll be getting any pay. I’ll just throw this out there, but Novem is just here to guard you guys. As long as you properly work, I’ll pay out the compensation, and if you show splendid results, I’ll even throw in a bonus. But the opposite will just cut down your pay, you know?”

The slender man looked at me, and became docile all of a sudden.

And the gnome young man mumbled about how dirty the saliva on

his face was, as he began wiping it off.

“I was just seriously… but this woman… the gnome…”

The man muttered out some complaints, and I raised up a loud voice.

“If you’ve got complaints, then bring them to me! If you don’t plan on working, then go shut yourself up somewhere, and don’t get in the way of work! Also, the progress here is the one falling furthest behind. If it stays this way, there won’t be any bonus.”

When I said that, the onlooking villagers swiftly restarted their digging.

There was a slight competition going on to see which area would finish up work first.

Normally, I would have placed a heavier emphasis on work quality, but right now, speed was the priority.

“I deeply apologize, Lyle-sama.”

I dismounted the horse, and checked over the progress with Novem.

“No, this one was one of the tolerable ones.”

While I said that, I looked at the gnome young man. I heard that they were skillful with their hands, and often found work in carpentry.

The blacksmith dwarf was helping Miranda-san dig holes to install the traps.

“If only that blacksmith that took a liking to you was here.”

As I said that in jest, Novem made a slightly troubled expression.

“Rather than here, I’d like it he worked on the pitfalls. Also, we also have to let him forge weapons.”

Crossbow bolts.

Spears.

We planned to have him prepare them.

“If the enemy appears here, run inside at once. At present, they haven’t shown any movement, but according to the village chief’s intuition, they’ll be coming in the near future.”

“I’ll take care. Make sure to be careful yourself, Lyle-sama.”

“I know.”

Saying that, I mounted the horse again, and used Skills to confirm the surrounding situation.

The next place a problem occurred was at Clara’s station.

(It’s problem after problem after problem…)

As I let the horse gallop, I heard the Third’s voice. With a cheerful voice of one enjoying life, he provoked me.

『Now onwards. When you’re on the observing side, these scenes become quite fun to watch.』

The Fourth agreed.

『It sure is easy when you don’t feel any responsibility for it. With the extra composure, there’s a lot more to see.』

The Fifth as well.

『Ah, I really get you, man.』

(These guys…)

I ignored the happy ancestors, and headed off towards Clara.

❼

Work had commenced, and the sun was just starting to fall.

Returning to Porter’s side, I got off the horse, and called out to Norma-san, who had been put on standby there.

“Did anyone come to you?”

In truth, I knew that no one had come to report, but I wanted to try talking to her.

In an ill mood, Norma spoke curtly.

“No one. That maid with a head full of flowers did bring me food, though.”

The wooden bowl put aside probably contained something soup-like when it was brought.

Having finished her meal, and sat in her chair the entire time, Norma-san seemed quite bored.

The Third spoke.

『Hey, this girl… just station her somewhere already.』

The Seventh refused.

『We’ve already decided to use her as a shortstop, right? Rejected. And Lyle is moving around more than expected, so having her here as a representative is plenty, isn’t it?』

I was a representative myself. And the representative of the representative was the real captain being represented…

I’m starting to lose track of it.

While we were doing that, Monica came over with my meal. A plate was placed on a tray, and with a smile, she ran over.

I was a little worried whether or not she’d fall like that, but when she got close enough, Monica declared.

“You thought I would earn points as a clumsy maid by tripping? Too bad! I am programmed to be unable to waste food.”

Her attitude, as if she was seeing right through me, was quite irritating, but I accepted her meal.

I had been riding around all day, so I was eating late.

Seeing my meal, Norma-san spoke.

“Oy, the contents of that plate are completely different from what I was served!”

Monica collected Norma-san’s silverware, as she scoffed.

“And so? The ingredients are all things we brought ourselves.”

I ignored Monica’s smirk, and Norma-san’s dejection, as I agilely went through the plate. Seeing that, the Seventh…

『Lyle… and he was such a well-mannered child back then.』

The Second was fed up.

『Just consider the time and the place. This is a battlefield.』

The Seventh shot back.

『Battlefield or not, the Walt House is a Count House! Such conduct is essential!』

To finish it, the Third…

『… But the current Lyle isn’t even a noble.』

While listening in on their conversations, I finished my meal.

Monica said something like, ‘such a grand way of eating… I also like that side of…’ but I ignored her, and used the Skill.

Unless I put in some breaks between each use, I would tire myself out.

I saw off Monica’s back as she took the tableware, and returned to her post.

I confirmed the state of the village, and the nearby forest.

And scratching my head, I stood up.

“… Can’t they at least let me take my breaks in peace?”

When I drew my sabre, Norma-san stood from her chair, alarmed. She took some distance from me.

I banged on Porter a few times, and out came Shannon.

She emerged while yawning, so I gave her a light flick.

“That hurt!”

“Prepare the signal. Hurry!”

Clumsily, Shannon lit fire to the device to raise signals installed close to Porter.

She used a simple magic to ignite it, and after a while, a thick smoke rose into the sky.

“Wah! I can’t breath!!”

Seeing Shannon cough as she retreated back into Porter, I thought.

(Truly, what wasted beauty.)

Norma-san was quite flustered, but there was no doubt she was a knight. The moment the signal was prepared, she had already prepared her weapon.

“They’re coming in numbers of approximately thirty. A Hippogryph is leading.”

Their numbers have risen from before.
I heard that they last attacked in only numbers of ten.

(Attacking humans, and building up power. I think I’ve read of it in a book…)

There were many mysteries regarding the nature of monsters.

The fact as to why they held magic stones within their body was the same, but their food habits were just as mysterious.

They did assault man and beast, but in comparison to their body mass, the time between their meals was long.

(But that isn’t something to think over here.)

I called over to Norma-san, and mounted my horse.

And to the runners that ran up, I gave an explanation of the situation.

Where were they coming from?

Their numbers?

Their variety?

Informing them of every detail, I issued orders of how to move.

To the knights and soldiers, it was their time to pile up some coins.

Rather than nervous, it seems they were wishing for the monsters to come over to them already.

“You’ll be taking on the ones besides the Hippogryph. If you do get attacked by it, fight back. Retreating is also fine.”

After I finished giving orders, the runners returned to their respective corps.

The expeditionary force had quite a few uncertain factors when it came to fighting a Hippogryph, but they had become a bit more decent than before.

Marcus-san and Breid-san ran up to me.

“Lyle! Have monsters appeared!?”

Marcus-san had his spear held high with the intention to fight.

Breid-san was also making a serious expression.

Seeing them, Norma-san disinterestedly muttered.

“… Hm, as if you lot’d be able to win.”

The party of three we saved gathered, so I issued order.

“The Hippogryph will enter the village. If it gets dangerous, evacuate yourself to a space nearby Porter.”

Breid-san spoke.

“I cannot run away here! I have to get merits no matter what!”

He did seem quite desperate, so I didn't say any more.

Reaching a hand to the bow on my back, I produced an arrow from my quiver. Since we were low on their stock, I was the one in possession of the exploding arrows.

I did think of giving them to Clark-san, but there wasn't the time to waste testing if they would work on a crossbow, so I left it at that.

Looking in the direction of the forest, I watched as the beast sprung up from it.

From between the trees, goblins poured out, and followed its lead.

"It'd be easier on us if they sent out the orcs too."

I wanted to whittle down the enemy's forces as much as possible, but it doesn't look like it'll go so smoothly.

The village became rowdy in an instant.

It seems there were some in doubt when the signal was raised, but seeing the real monster made some frantically take shelter for real.

"With this, I hope the real deal will go down fine."

Marcus-san looked at me, and spoke.

"Real deal… this is as real as it gets."

I shook my head.

"Based on how much we manage to win by here, our future battles will change."

Hearing my words, the Sixth called over to me.

『So you've learned to talk. But don't be negligent.』

I gripped the Jewel, and observed the movements of the monsters.

(From their location, it'll be Aria's turn.)

… The monsters attacking Johnny village weren't able to breach the wall.

There, soldiers and knights with spears and crossbows worked to whittle down their numbers.

But such things were irrelevant to the Hippogryph flying through the skies.

It dove straight into the village, sending a single soldier sprawling, as it looked around for its prey.

Its front feet held the talons of an eagle.

Clasped around that soldier, they didn't seem like they would be letting go.

That man, upon being brushed off his feet, and gripped strongly, those claws digging into his flesh, began vomiting up blood.

Around, knights held up their spears, and surrounded it.

Its form, more than twice the size of a horse, was enough to make them lose strength in their knees despite the financial prospects of taking it down.

Within that, the one to rush forth was Aria.

Gripping her spear, she unfastened her buckler, and leapt at the Hippogryph.

"Now try flying without a wing!"

She instantly closed the distance, and thrust out at it.

But perhaps it had good eyes, as the Hippogryph leapt back, and swiftly lifted itself into the air.

It tossed the soldier in its claw aside, and the man's comrades rushed over to his aid.

Aria quickly tossed a knife at it, but she didn't have skills on Miranda's level with it, and the Hippogryph was easily able to dodge it.

It spread its wings, and rose up, opening its eagle beak to let out the shrill voice of a singing bird.

It set her in its sight, and tried to swoop down, but Aria smiled.

“Don’t be underestimating humans.”

The moment the monster began to gain momentum, everyone evacuated the area.

The net didn’t make it in time.

But it’s not like there were no other methods.

She tossed ropes with rocks attached at both ends at its eyes.

Thrown taking advantage of its centrifugal force, while most of it was off mark, a single one of the rocks came down on its head, and the next rope wrapping around its left wing was all it took to drop it to the ground.

The Hippogryph instantly shook off its bindings, but Aria didn’t let such a chance escape her.

Her red gem let off some light, and she used a Skill.

As the end of her spear pierced through its head, the struggling Hippogryph was shot down, and pinned to the ground

Such a display of power didn’t seem to be something of a girl.

Extreme strength.

“With that cute face of hers…”
“Yeah, I think I’ll give up on her.”
“The blood spurt’s dyed her bright red.”

With her lance still stuck in, the blood pouring out of the flailing monster soaked her entire body, causing those around to pull back.

(God, for them to be of this level… the knights of Centralle sure are frail.)

Confirming that it had stopped moving, Aria took out a towel, and

wiped off her face.

Collecting up the tools she had thrown, the soldiers and villagers checked in with her.

“U-um… what about our work?”

Aria answered with a smile.

Even so, the soldiers raised scared and alarmed voices.

“Don’t worry about it. I’ll be sure to notify Lyle. I’ll be counting on you next time as well.”

“Y-yes!”

Recovering the tools, the knights and soldiers confirmed the Hippogryph’s corpse.

After feeling certainty in its death, one of them ran out to report.

“Now then, about the situation outside…”

Saying that, and surveying her surroundings, she found that the ones stationed at the walls had already gathered to see the Hippogryph.

(So it’s already over. We have one injured…)

With a door taken off its hinges to make a sort of stretcher, the soldier was carried off.

Based on his conditions, Aria determined Novem would be able to do something about it. She pulled her spear out of the monster’s body.

Seeing the body of an eagle stuck onto a horse, she found some satisfaction in her own growth.

(But if it comes to a Gryphon, it really will be tough.)

From the feeling she felt when she thrust in it, she surmised that if its skull was only a little bit harder…

Or so she thought to herself.

She could no longer be called a noble Lady.

As Aria looked over the state of her own weapon, Lyle came racing on a horse.

Behind him followed Marcus and Breid, and when they saw the battle had already finished, they dropped their shoulders.

(Perhaps they didn't catch sight of the injured.)

Lyle got down from the mount, and addressed some thankful words to her.

"It looks like this one finished without much injury. I'm relieved that you're alright. Even so, that was pretty much a single blow, wasn't it?"

Aria wiped off the blood as she spoke.

It was a short response, but her voice seemed happy.

"R-really? Well, I'm still growing."

Lyle surveyed the surroundings, and ordered the injured knights and soldiers to fall back.

And he left Marcus and Breid to fill the gaps.

Both of them seemed quite reluctant.

Seeing the two of them unwillingly walk off towards the wall, Aria spoke.

"… Lyle?"

"Hm?"

"Was I like that as well?"

Lyle smiled.

"That's right. You kinda kept saying that keeping watch was an easy job, and were unhappy all the way. You kept saying you wanted to do something more important, and that came up in your attitude. Well, you weren't that frank with it, though."

At Lyle's laugh, Aria grew angry.

“Don’t put it so bluntly! Even like this, I’m sure I’m repenting for it!”

Lyle’s smile turned to a gentler one.

“Then isn’t that fine? Now we can just look back at it as a funny story. Well, I’ve no idea what’s to become of those two.”

Perhaps they’d never be able to laugh at it. Perhaps they’d think back, and regret that they hadn’t been more serious at the time.

Lyra, who had lost her arms, and suffered such burns… remembering the second adventurer who had instructed her, Aria’s expression become serious.

Before she had undertaken her training, Lyle had always made a slightly sad expression around her. Aria hadn’t let that escape her eyes.

And Lyle spoke.

“We’ve prepared a bath for the injured, so you can wash down your body there. Ah, also…”

“Also?”

Thinking there was something more, she peered into Lyle’s earnestly worried face, and…

“… We aren’t just among party members here, so I recommend you don’t loiter around naked like you did in Arumsaas.”

“I-I won’t!”

Seeing the two flirting like that, the surrounding knights, soldiers, and even the villagers…

“I… don’t think I can get it up for a girl soaked in blood.”
“That woman’s strong, but that man’s quite strong in a different sense.”
“Adventurer, and knight, and soldier women are definitely a no go for me…”

When Aria glared at the people saying such things, they immediately scampered off…

10 - Gryphon

After the Hippogryph was defeated, the monsters hiding in the forest showed no signs of movement.

Lying down in Luka's house, I kept the blanket over me as I woke up time and again in the middle of the night to check the surroundings with the Skills.

I would periodically wake myself every few hours to observe their activity.

"We shaved away around thirty. But close to two hundred remain… they're increasing."

I did find the monsters, which had risen to an even greater number than they had from the start, to be a threat, but our reinforcement work was even proceeding through the night.

Novem was dispatched to the center of the village to devote herself to healing, and I had Aria and Miranda-san rest at night.

The only ones awake were likely Clara and Monica.

I suddenly had to pay close to forty gold coins, but I made sure to show off a posture as if I'd always be able to pay out such an amount.

I thought about falling asleep again, but there, the Sixth called out to me.

『What, you can't sleep? Better get used to it. Rest when you have time for rest! It'll be the worst if your body won't move when it comes down to it.』

Around, Luka and his mother were asleep, and Shannon was also lying down.

Miranda-san and Aria were fast asleep.

Confirming no one else was awake, I gave the Sixth an answer.

“I’ll be fine without some sleep to an extent. It’s just that whenever I think that something might happen, I end up waking up.”

And the Sixth…

『Well how about you trust the others a bit more? You saw Aria’s abilities, right? Leave what you can to them, and take care of what you have to do yourself.』

The centerpiece this time, the Gryphon…

The one to take it on will likely be me.

Practically, I’d like to surround it with my party, and beat it down, but in that case, we’ll be short on hands in protecting the village from the other monsters.

Sensing someone move their body, I shut y eyes and mouth.

(The one who stirred is Luka, I see.)

“… Dad…”

(His father was assaulted by a Hippogryph. In that caes, it’s already…)

During the monster attack, we did force him to evacuate, so Luka was quite discontent.

I’ll be he wanted to avenge his father.

From how he resembled the Second’s eldest son, I did promise to look after him when I had some free time.

Seeing that the night was coming to a close, I raised the top half of my body. I stood, stretched, and woke up Luka.

When I rocked his small body, he opened his eyes.

“Huh? Lyle-sama?”

“Think you can get up?”

When I said that, heroes with sleepy eyes.

“What? C-could it be…”

As he seemed to be under the misunderstanding that an enemy had arrived, I put my index finger to my mouth, and shushed him.

He held both hands to his mouth, and I spoke.

“Come outside, I’ll train you a bit.”

Saying that, I took Luka out of the house.

❼

That place in the village with targets set up had been prepared in order to practice with crossbows.

From all over, I could hear the voices of men working to fortify the place.

“At this rate, we’ll finish what’s been planned by noon.”

I can’t say for certain the Gryphon won’t pop out by them, but even so, preparations for our victory were proceeding steadily.

And I watched Luka loose arrows as he aimed at the mark.

They didn’t land anywhere close. They went off in a completely different direction.

“Huh? That’s strange…”

He was borrowing the small bow I carried around with me.

As I bought it to use in the labyrinth, I had it made smaller than usual.

But to Luka, it must have been quite large.

“Look, set your aim. You have to keep your eyes on the target up to the end.”

His strained face had been averted, to the arrows were shot without a mark.

“Definitely don’t pull it back past your ear. Right, just like that.”

The next arrow didn’t hit the target either.

“You sure this isn’t broken?”

I made a wry smile, as I took the bow from him, and took out a single arrow. When I took a stance, and released it, the arrow stabbed into the very center of the target.

“Wow!”

“Make sure you get a firm grasp on the fundamentals. This isn’t my specialty, so I can’t teach you any of the finer details, though.”

There, Luka looked at the sabre hanging at my waist.

“Lyle-sama, I’d prefer that one as well. Or maybe a spear like that red neechan’s.”

I patted Luka’s head.

“Today’s the bow. If I find some more free time, I’ll teach you other things. More importantly, are you able to read and write, Luka?”

He averted his eyes.

“… As long as the chief and important people can do it, there won’t be a problem. I mean, it’s hard.”

I spoke.

“But there’s nothing to be lost in learning it. The three Rs are important.”

Frowning, Luka took back the bow, and pulled it again.

“I’m going to become strong, and avenge my dad!”

As he said that, the arrow once again failed to hit its mark.

Seeing the scene, the Second let out a voice of which I couldn’t discern if it was happy or sad.

『He sure cares for his father.』

The Third seemed worried.

『It's a nice thing to have, but at his age, that's a little… Lyle, make sure you check in on him every now and again.』

And just like that, I continued training him in the art of the bow until the time came.

The reason I decided on the bow was… because I felt like it.

❼

After finishing my lesson, I ate breakfast, and entered into work.

And whenever something happened, I would head to the scene, and issue orders.

The planned reinforcements and traps were finished before noon had passed.

As I thought, it really was different when there was a reward in sight. The villagers worked quite fast.

I borrowed a horse to circle around the stations, looked for areas that needed even further modifications, offered up bonus pay, and allotted work once more.

I did prepare a large amount of funds from the start, but it wasn't going as calculated.

Because the ancestors had planned it out some we would have some to spare, we did have the minimum amount or preparations in order.

Gathered in Porter, we confirmed the current situation after lunch.

Clark-san, who had been training the soldiers, explained it out.

"We are having crossbow bolts be made, but quite a few of them are being ruined in training, so I'd like it if they were procured en masse. Even so, we're dividing into two man teams of one to aim and fire, and the other to load the crossbow… If they were close

enough, they'd likely hit, but setting aim on a flying enemy will be difficult for them."

I nodded, and heard out the report from the village chief.

"The reinforcement of the village has finished, and right now, additional measure are being carried out centered on those that had been resting up to now… Those that had worked through the night are resting at the moment."

I filled out the places that were still being worked on on the map, and received Monica's report.

"Our food expenditure is fast. To put it bluntly, if we're to continue fighting while holed into their village, we don't even have two weeks left. If you go any longer, even if you manage to exterminate the enemy, the village will be left without any supplies."

The harvest had already passed, but with this great increase in numbers, it couldn't be helped there was an increase in the number of mouths to feed.

Novem reported.

"I've finished treating the injured. I think it will be difficult for the soldier who suffered heavy injuries to participate in the coming battle, but his life isn't in danger. I think he'll be able to move just fine by the time we're to return to the capital."

There were some injured during work, but also soldiers getting into fights over who defeated what.

There was a plainly large amount of unnecessary trouvle like that going around.

At present, all we can really do is wait for what's to come.

It would be bad to tire ourselves out by prioritizing work, so we set up a watch, and had them take breaks on surveillance.

There, the chief asked me for my opinion.

"U-um… there are some whose houses and fields have been

destroyed. Once all work is done, would you perhaps be able to direct some manpower towards that area?”

Hearing that, Norma-san dismissed the issue.

“Fool. When we’re trying to give the troops and civilians some well-deserved rest, any more extraneous work will…”

While Norma-san was making a sound argument, Clark-san looked to her with his head in his hands.

The Second quickly spoke to me.

『Take it up. Also, send out some assistance from our side as well. Right… dispatch Clara, and have her help with village maintenance. Marcus as well.』

I want to let them rest, but following the Second’s opinion, I took up the chief’s proposition.

“I’ll allot some hands myself. If there’s anything in need of assistance, please bring it to me. But please don’t try for too much.”

“Y-yes!”

When I looked at the village chief’s relieved face, I noticed Norma-san glaring at me.

She likely had something she wanted to say, but as I was the commander at the moment, she kept quiet.

She was surprisingly level-headed.

The Third spoke.

『… If this girl had properly learned under another, perhaps she could have become an excellent knight.』

If looked at in a different sense, perhaps she already was.

I continued the meeting with the chief, asking what areas needed extra assistance, and considering who to send.

Seeing that, Clark-san seemed quite relieved as well.

❼

On the third day without a monster attack. When evening arrived, Clara came to my place to give a report.

Having slept from morning to noon, she had begun using magic as soon as she awoke to set about maintaining the village.

She used magic to assist with work, and it seemed she was thanked quite a bit.

“… Are you alright? You seem a little unsteady on your feet.”

Receiving my worry, Clara sat in a chair, and poured herself a drink.

Stem arose from the wooden cup.

“No, being relied on and thanked to that extent is just a little…”

She had only used simple magics to help out a little. But even so, having been applauded to such an extent, Clara didn’t really know how to feel.

Normally, she would probably have been able to do something greater, but to limit her mana use, she only did small favors.

I wonder what she had to think of it.

“Well isn’t that fine? You’ll be working hard tomorrow. Also, when it comes down to it, I’ll be having you operate Porter.”

Looking at Porter, I determined it would have decent power just smashing into enemies.

(… If I added on arms, perhaps I could have it hold weapons.)

A new modification plan surfaced in my head, so I looked to Clara.

“It’s because I was never received this much gratitude in Arumsaas. I mean, there were planty of magicians out there of my measly level.”

She hung her head a little.

“… But you’re happy that you’re being of use, so shouldn’t that be enough? For me, I tried my heart out just to get recognized, and it never worked out all the way to the end.”

When I said that, Clara made an unexpected expression.

“*You* did, Lyle-san? Even if I were to give a reserved evaluation of you, you’re at a level where you could aim for the top ranks of adventurers. I think there’s even the possibility you’ll leave your name in the records of history.”

“Me?”

I smiled as I responded, but Clara looked serious.

“Less than a year since you became one, you breached the fortieth basement floor of Arumsaas’ Labyrinth. That’s an amazing achievement, Lyle.”

I remembered back to when I cleared the fortieth floor of the labyrinth at Damien’s request.

“I wonder. We had Damien with us back then. And I’m just a kid kicked out by his family.”

Clara seemed perplexed.

“They drove *you* out, Lyle-san? From my perspective, I can’t see you as having many problems.”

“… Not that I’ve none to speak of.”

When I said that, she nodded expressionlessly. Seeing me, she declared my no-good parts.

“Yes, I think there’s quite a bit. In truth, you did consult with me at Arumsaas a lot. Since it’s been a while, I’ll say it, but I was quite surprised back then. You started worrying about what a new-comer adventurer of a few months should worry about only after you successfully cleared the fortieth floor.”

With a restriction on my Skills, I tried challenging the Labyrinth of my own ability. At that time, I asked what was necessary of me from

Clara.

When I made a cynical smile, she laughed a little.

“But I’m also thankful, you know. I’m sure I would have been fine staying in Arumsaas, but having come out, I can experience so much more.”

Saying that, Clara drunk the contents of her cup dry, and walked into Porter with her face a little red.

The Fourth judged me.

『Hey, right there… that’s where you should be saying, ‘And I’m happy to be able to travel with you as well!’』

Just what is he trying to say?

When I thought something like that, Clark-san called out to me.

“Oh, are you alone?”

He shouldered his crossbow on his back, and made a tired face.

He was carrying out training in preparations for when the monsters were to attack next.

“Looks like you have it rough too.”

When I said that, Clark-san smiled.

“It’s because real battles are all about how much of your training you can pull out. Exhibiting such power in a single night like a hero isn’t something for us ordinary folk.”

Saying that, he sat down in a chair.

There was an open air fire close to us, and from the pot hanging over, I poured some soup into a cup, and handed it to him.

“Thank you.”

With his modest disposition, I felt he had something he wanted to say to me.

“Something the matter?”

“… Lyle-kun, could it be you’re a former Noble? I don’t think you’re an imperial noble, so you must be a provincial one… ah, you don’t have to answer if you don’t want to.”

A little surprised, I decided not to speak so deeply into it, and nodded.

“I was thrown out.”

“That so. Then it’s best I don’t ask your circumstances. But to be honest here, you’ve really been our savior. If someone accustomed to it like you wasn’t here to give orders, I doubt I’d ever be able to do that much… and Captain Norma would never have conceded the right to command.”

I spoke.

“I’m pretty sure she handed it over quite easily, though?”

“It was surprising to see that person do such a thing. Perhaps that magic, and that mountain of gold had an effect on her.”

Smiling, Clark-san explained how he was able to understand I was a former noble.

Apparently, it wasn’t because I had used magic, but from my bearing and manner.

“I’ve been in this job a while. It lets you see quite an assortment of people. The reason I thought you were a provincial noble was because you took the villagers’ feelings into consideration, perhaps?”

He was likely referring to how I listened to the chief’s request, and dispatched people.

“Is that really so rare?”

“… The Imperial knights always seem to be a little dense in that field. If played poorly, they’re never able to get cooperation, and the air often turns quite awkward. Like that, work never moves forward. The ones with the best understanding there have to be the Provincial

Nobles.”

Looks like he had his share of troubles.

The Fifth spoke.

『This guy’s that. He likely thinks Lyle was the heir to a small territory at most.』

The Seventh agreed.

『I’ll bet. I would never be able to put out opinions like the Second.』

Both of them seemed to be praising the Second.

But the man himself…

『… Don’t compare me to real nobles like yourselves. Just how to expand a miniscule territory, just what would be alright to do? I had to put some thought into various things from bottom up. Well, I only ever had that way of doing things. 』

The third spoke.

『and because of that, I sure had it easy. Man~ it really was a blast. The Second had everything prepared in advance, so I just had to move as planned.』

While listening to the Third’s cheerful voice, I continued exchanging some idle banter with Clark-san.

❼

The third day came to an end. And the fourth. Finally, we welcomed the morning of the fifth day.

Waking up early to teach Luka the bow, I saw that the village that had gotten together its preparations to intercept the enemy had grown much brighter.

There, I heard the sound of an arrow hitting the target.

“Yay! I hit it!”

Seeing Luka's display of joy, I offered some praise.

"That's great. Being able to hit it on only the third day of training is amazing, isn't it?"

The distance wasn't long, and the target was only hit on the edge.

But even so, considering his performance up to now, his rate of improvement was considerable fast.

Seeing that, the Second spoke.

『Perhaps this is the influence of your own Skill, Lyle. Next show him to draw it further and fire.』

The Second spoke up in regards to Luka's bow training.

He seemed quite happy.

(My Skill,【Experience】's power… I can't really say.)

It was a perpetually active Skill that just stated it let one attain a large amount of experience, but even up to now, I have absolutely no idea what extent of effect it could display.

It did constantly drain my mana, so it was more of a shackle to me.

"Hey, teach me the sword next!"

"Nope. And even when taught, you weren't able to use one, right?"

"Don't be like that, I'm beggin' you here~"

While behaving mildly spoiled, Luka smiled, and took a stance with the bow. But I immediately turned to the direction of the forest.

"Lyle-sama?"

He seemed quite anxious.

I directed a smile, reclaimed the bow and arrows from him, and spoke.

"Please go and rouse everyone, Luka… today's going to be a busy one."

The monsters moving around in the forest weren't coming out in such small numbers as before. It seems everything that could move was moving.

With my Skills, it looked as if the forest itself was wriggling.

"I-I'll fight too!"

"Nope."

Saying that, I cautioned him.

"Listen here, make sure you protect your mother. The adults will take on the monsters."

Like that, I took Luka back to his house, woke up Shannon, and had her raise the signal.

❼

… Woken by the sound of a bell struck again and again, Breid jumped up, and took his equipment in hand.

Those around him were also panicked, and they frantically tried to collect up their own armaments.

There, Breid stuck his glare onto a hand reaching in from the side.

"That one's mine!"

The knight beside him clicked his tongue, as he moved his eyes to find another someone to try stealing from.

With his armor covering his body soon enough, he ran outside, and called out to Marcus, who also had his equipment at the ready.

"Oy, we're heading out to the center immediately!"

"I'd have done that without you yelling at me!"

In the past few days, he had only been used for work mending the village.

(I’m not even getting much a reward lately. I have to get a large achievement here.)

Breid-san was impatient.

Promotion…

His father wasn’t a knight granted the position to pass on his knight position by heredity. He was a knight for his generation alone.

Breid’s brothers had given up on reaching knighthood, and had left the house in search of work.

In the house left with barely anything left to inherit, he alone resolved himself to become a knight, staying behind, learning letters and mathematics.

He learned swordsmanship from his father, and swung it around every day.

When he was putting so much work into it, the fact that effortless knights who couldn’t even read existed out there served as nothing but to irritate him.

What he couldn’t forgive more than anything, was Lyle, who left himself to become an adventurer.

Even when he had lost his status, he had succeeded in earning a large sum in another field.

He was undoubtedly the one contributing the most to this time’s Gryphon subjugation.

(And yet…)

And yet, Lyle had said he didn’t need any merits.

It was as if he were stating that all Breid had been striving for his entire life held absolutely no worth.

And that, he couldn’t’ forgive.

When he raced forward, the party of three he had become acquainted with during the march approached.

The Leader-ish man spoke up.

“Oy, could this mean…!”

Marcus-san replied.

“You don’t have to spell it out! Just look at the sky!”

The sound of bells, and the rising smoke.

It was the signal that the monsters had begun to move.

“If I do well here…”

Because he had been by Lyle’s side the last time, he wasn’t given an opportunity to do anything during the first attack.

Form his point of view, a miscalculation would be a blessing.

Marcus spotted Porter, and found that a number had already gathered there.

Lyle got the preparations in order, and issued out directions.

(This time. Surely enough merit to become a knight!)

An enthusiastic Breid arrived before Lyle.

❼

I gave a sequence of orders to the platoon gathered near Porter.

“We’ll be the ones to defeat the Gryphon and Hippogryphs. Please be careful so as not to suffer injury. Also, while they still have their momentum, we’ll be making use of traps. Knights, prepare yourselves to defeat the monsters that get through!”

The Second also issued orders.

『There’s still some time. Have them face them after a meal. Because power can’t be exhibited on an empty stomach.』

“A little is enough, so please head out after eating some! Monica!”

When I sent a glance to Monica, she lined up bread with ingredients stuffed in between, and cups of warm soup she had prepared in advance.

“I, Monica, am always ready for anything. Now thank me in tears afterwards.”

“I’ll legally change your name back to Poyopoyo! When you’ve finished eating, move to your station! And to the runners…”

When I was giving orders, Marcus-san and the others ran up.

“Lyle, what should we be doing!?”

Looking at them, I gave out orders.

“When you’re done eating, wait on standby near Porter. I’ll have you earning your keep on backup and ambush.”

Really, just by participating in the battle, they’ll be racking up achievements.

I’m fine with including whatever I’ve defeated in their numbers as well.

They are our targets to guard, so if possible, I don’t want them anywhere too dangerous.

But Breid-san shouted out.

“That can’t be… we’ve come to fight as well, you know! Even if you just deployed us at the front, then merits are…!”

I didn’t want to station them in the most dangerous spot, so I spoke.

“I’m not throwing you into the most dangerous station, you’ll be remaining here! Aria!”

With a piece of bread in her mouth, Aria looked at me.

“Fwa fhwifwhi?” (What is it?)

“The front lines will be rough. If you’re up against the Gryphon, I don’t mind if you run.”

Aria washed down the bread with soup, and wiped her mouth.

It was quite a manly gesture.

“I know. I’ll leave it to you, Lyle. Make sure you deal with it properly.”

As I gave out order after another, I made sure everyone headed towards their station before looking towards the sky.

“… So it’s come.”

Time-wise, we had some to spare.

What soared through the skies were the bodies of thee monsters.

One of them was conspicuously bigger than the other two, and it let out a cry I could hear, even from here.

From the forest, goblins and orcs began to emerge.

The number I confirmed with my Skill exceeded two hundred.

The wings and head of an eagle.

And from neck down, the body of a lion.

Bearing sharp claws, its form flying through the air was quite gallant.

Someone in the area called out.

“… It really is a Gryphon.”

The boss of the monsters, who hadn’t show his form ‘til now, spread out its wings, and headed in or direction.

The Gryphon battle was about to start.

11 - The Young Commanders

From the station in the center of the village, I issued orders on horseback.

Looking up in the sky, the Gryphon was looking down on us all from up high.

The air was filled with the cries of monsters, and the war cries of the soldiers, knights and fief.

We had greater numbers than that of the monsters.

But the numbers we had capable of combat was lower.

Even so…

『We hold the advantage in a defensive battle, but how will the Gryphon move… oy, we managed to let the orcs pass magnificently.』

As the Fifth said that, my Skills confirmed a few orcs had purposely been let passed, and cornered.

The Third spoke.

『How wonderful. How about you go meet them?』

His grin surfaced in my mind, and I let out a loud voice.

“Activate the traps on the east side! Move out!”

A large bell chimed in the number of times decided by the party of three. To confirm they had received the necessary instruction, bells rang out in return.

The small village was growing loud, and within that, the ancestors instructed me to make my orders short and precise.

For the expeditionary force made up of the odds and ends, complex orders wouldn’t be transmitted.

The one stationed on the east side was Miranda.

The traps were quite simple ones.

Shannon popped her face out of Porter.

“You stay inside!”

“I can’t help but be curious!”

Perhaps worried about her elder sister, Shannon looked to the east.

(Can she see it? Her eyes truly are amazing.)

While we were doing that, Marcus-san posed questions to me.

“Oy, it’s really alright, right!? If they keep flooding in like this…”

The Sixth seemed quite irritated. Even if Marcus-san couldn’t hear it, he shouted out.

『Don’t raise a ruckus about the commander! You’ll make the surroundings anxious!』

The Seventh seemed cold.

『Lyle’s first defensive battle… and he has these men as his troops…』

Why did all the ancestors seem to be having such fun? I couldn’t understand, nor did I have the sentiment to.

“… If they come in, we just have to fight them. We’ve made more than enough preparations for that sake.”

And I confirmed the body of our troops with Skills.

There were some places stagnating, and some reducing the monsters’ numbers at a favorable pace.

As I thought, this is where the gap in commander experience comes up.

(The one doing best is Clark-san’s station. Crossbows sure are powerful.)

Enjoying himself, the Third spoke.

『Up so high in the sky, it thinks it's playing at being commander? Is it still young… I thought it would be a little more competent. How unfortunate.』

The Fourth spoke.

『It likely understands its disadvantage when we're on a defensive front. I doubt it had much of a choice. Well, perhaps that Gryphon cares not how many of the small fries are killed off? Lyle, make sure you command in a way that makes you stand out.』

If it were clever, the beast should be looking down at me.

Getting a grasp of who it was giving commands…

When the runners returned, I heard out their reports.

To put it bluntly, it wasn't necessary, but it was to show off who the commander was to the sky.

I was waiting for the Gryphon and Hippogryphs circling around the perimeter of the village to make a move.

❼

… At the gate in the east, Miranda had nicely timed the opening of the gate to let in the attacking orcs.

Soaked in water and mud, the gate had a rope fastened to it, and it was always prepared to open and close.

Even when it was the bright and early morning, Miranda held a torch in good humor.

"As expected of Lyle. He knows who to use where."

The inside of the gate was fenced in by stockades.

In order to prevent the advance of intruders, logs with sharpened ends had been impaled into the ground, and the gaps between them

were just enough that goblins wouldn't be able to make it past.

And in order to pierce their spears through those small openings, the soldiers were lying in wait.

When the gate opened, perhaps the enemy found it surprising as well, as they stared at Miranda with wide eyes.

Even with fencing in between them, the soldiers and knights faltered at their sight.

But the enemies that had attempted to ram the door open didn't find a point to transfer their momentum, so they tried to brace their feet as they burst through the gate.

"How unfortunate."

When Miranda smiled, the orcs continued sliding forward, pushed from behind, without an end, finding their place impaled on the spears.

Monsters came in one after another, but they were unable to deal with the spikes shooting through the gaps.

Miranda held up her torch, and a nearby soldier tossed a sack full of oil.

When the sack tore, Miranda chucked the flame.

"I'm sorry, we're over capacity."

She said that in a cute tone, as the burning monsters raised screams of agony.

For those among them that tried to use their comrades as footholds to escape to the other side of the stockades, the knights stuck their spears out to end them.

An ominous one-eyed bird tried coming down at Miranda from the sky, but she threw her knife, pierced its head, and it fell to the ground.

There were other, smaller, monsters left alive, but the men with their eyes clouded by the prospect of money surrounded them, and dealt

the fatal blows.

“There really are too few. Come in three times that number next.”

While complaining on the scarcity of good monsters, Miranda walked over to a slightly-far soldier with a bell, and notified him of their success.

The bell of the prevalence of the traps.

Another ring was immediately returned from the center.

“Yes, close the gate. I’ll extinguish the fires, so step back.”

Nearby buckets of water were grabbed and poured over the stockades.

The burning carcasses covering the earth let off a putrid scent.

Miranda didn’t even grimace, as she calmly wrapped a cloth across her face.

Using the rope, the soldiers shut the door, and all the remaining monsters within it were promptly taken care of.

A nearby soldier called out to Miranda.

“It looks like it went well, Miranda-san!”

But all that came from her mouth was the single word, ‘yep.’

(And wait, this is more of an add on. The main battle looks like it’ll be around Aria again.)

Miranda worried for Aria on the north side, but she soon changed her thoughts.

(Now then, won’t a troublesome monster come my way?)

Seeing the rejoicing troops around her, Miranda ordered for them to return to their stations at once…

…On the north of the village, fire was being rained on the gate.

Goblins wearing robes held up staves as they made use of magic.

But…

“Aim for the robed ones! The rest can wait!”

Clark issued out orders, as he shot down monsters with his crossbow.

Footing had been made on the inside wall, and he sniped them down from there.

Only the space in front of the gate had been left without a trench, so the monsters naturally gathered there.

“But the orcs are…!”

A crossbow wielding soldier cried out, but Clark handed his empty crossbow to his subordinate, and accepted another loaded one as he yelled in response.

He quickly stanced himself to aim to the outside of the wall.

“If it burns down, they’ll come in all at once! Take down the troublesome monsters first!”

The screaming soldier, of course, knew that the orcs would pay out a higher reward. For that sake, he had wanted to focus his aim on them.

Clark continued his attacks with the priority of taking down their magic users as the basis for his aim.

He was perhaps the only one who continued hitting on the mark, and a large majority of arrows found their places in the ground.

Maybe they were nervous, as the nearby monsters were raising up quite a cry.

The orcs continued bashing at the doors, and it seemed like they could burst through at any minute.

(Even if we do have the traps in place, they can't help but be uneasy…)

His aimed bolt pierced a robed goblin, and it collapsed.

The number of enemies wasn't going down as quickly as he had hoped.

(But having them flow through, and leaving it to that girl is a little…)

On the inside, was the form of Aria, waiting for the monsters to break through.

She had slain a Hippogryph on the second day, so no one raised a complaint.

There wasn't a soul who thought she'd be done in by something on the level of an orc.

But there were no absolutes in the world.

Even a warrior who could take down orcs could lose their life if surrounded by measly goblins.

As one fought, there were ways of going about things to put them at an advantage or disadvantage.
Clark knew that.

"At the very least, I have to take down those… alright!"

His arrow found its mark again, and the final of the troublesome robed goblins fell. Hearing a scream from nearby, he saw a soldier had lost their footing.

"H-heeeeellpppp!!"

Attacked by a black crow-like monster with a single eye, he continued falling, and collided, likely suffering a fracture or two.

Clark immediately stopped the other crossbowed soldiers who had turned to aim at it.

"Don't shoot at it! You all just concentrate on the monsters outside!"

He was scared of them hitting an ally, but more than that, they already had their set roles.

The knights who came running struck at the monster with their spears. They saved the soldier, and carried him off as an injured.

The fall had caused the bowstring to snap, so one of their limited supply of crossbows had become unusable.

“Whoever was that man’s partner, go accompany him! Everyone else, keep aiming at the monsters below!”

There were still plenty of monsters beyond the gate.

If those numbers were to enter, even if they could be defeated, the number of patients would increase.

So Clark continued to fire his crossbow…

❼

When I learned that Miranda-san’s side had gone through successfully, I sent out a runner.

“Send reinforcements from the east to the north. Ten soldiers!”

“Yes!”

Seeing the messenger run off, I looked to the sky.

Not showing a notable movement, it didn’t even seem the numbers being shaved away even held any meaning to the Gryphon, as it continued sending its gaze over here.

The Second spoke.

『This is where it should come at you in one fell swoop! Attack from the sky or something already. There are plenty of ways!』

(Whose ally are you trying to be?)

The Third was…

『Lyle, make sure to follow through for Marcus and his group as well. They do seem to be quite irritated, so go give them a job or something.』

(And just what is it they're irritated about? They do have a prim and proper job to do!)

The Fourth…

『Don't just concentrate on one spot. Look over the entire field. Before the Gryphon comes, make preparations to send Marcus and the others as reinforcements to the north.』

(And I have to concentrate to get the right timing for that…)

The Fifth…

『Yeah, they really will be in the way.』

(I can't argue with that logic, but it's a request… why are my comrades the larger pain here?)

The Gryphon's party looking down on us from up high didn't display signs of action.

The Second spoke.

『… It's kinda like that. Perhaps the higherup wants you guys to exhaust your power dealing with the small ones before it comes in for the kill.』

The Seventh.

『Well from what I see, it is quite young. If it grew up just a little bit more, it may develop some wisdom in a good direction, but…』

For some reason, the Sixth was quite buoyant.

『Lyle, do you have your rope and cloth? Also, make sure you take the Gryphon in a single strike. It'll sell for quite a bit.』

The Fifth.

『If you get too much blood on it, you'll slip off. When you're riding its

back, make sure you…』

(I ain't riding nothing!)

Atop the horse, I took a deep breath, and looked around.

The ones looking at me with clear displeasure were the ones stationed by my side. Marcus, and friends. They were irritatedly waiting for their part to come.

In contrast, Norma-san seemed quite calm sitting in her chair.

(… I wonder what it is. I did definitely receive the commanding authority, but for some reason, I want her to look a little more annoyed.)

I ignored the noisy ancestors in the Jewel, and spoke to Marcus-san.

"… After a while, I'll be having you go to the north as reinforcements. Please prepare yourself to move out at a moment's notice."

Marcus-san grew brighter, and more motivated, but it looked like Breid-san was reaching his limit.

"And when will that be! At this rate, the battle will draw to an end, will it not!?"

Marcus-san attempted to soothe him.

"O-oy…"

"And won't you pipe down!? The rest of my life is on the line in this battle!"

His life is on the line.

Hearing those words, I couldn't help but think.

… On something of this level…?

…

And I heard a shrill cry from high above. On that voice louder than a Hippogryph's, I looked up, and immediately gave orders to nearby

runners.

“Tell the north gate to continue concentrating on defense! And the east gate that a Hippogryph is headed their way!”

The two messengers ran off.

And to Marcus-san and the others, looking at the sky in a similar fashion, I spoke.

“Wait on standby here! They’ll come aiming at me.”

Breid-san burst out.

“Why is that! Even I can make myself useful!”

Based on the map birthed by my Skills, one Hippogryph had headed off towards the east gate.

The Fourth spoke.

『Yes, perhaps it’s because the numbers have dwindled there. They should have just come at Lyle, the three of them together. Or maybe gather in one place.』

The Second…

『But at that point, it’d just be reinforcements, and the end. And wait, the Fifth and Sixth’s Skills sure are convenient. I’d have given an arm and a leg for them in my time.』

I abandoned Breid-san, and galloped off on the horse.

Having separated from Porter, I observed them again, to find the remaining Hippogryph and Gryphon were following me.

As I thought, they’ve come to crush the leader.

The Third spoke.

『Lyle, how about you exterminate the troublesome Hippogryph first? That one’s just a small one borrowing the face of a big-shot. If it were human, it’d be a useless one.』

I wondered whether monsters really had that sort of typing, but the

one who attacked me from my horse first was indeed the Hippogryph.

I used some Skills.

To output abilities beyond one's limit,【Limit Burst】.

The Second's Skill that covered a wider range than All,【Field】.

I leapt off the horse, and hit it with my right arm to signal it to run and take refuge.

"Lightning!"

An electric charge emerged, and came down at the two beasts.

The Hippogryph was hit without the chance to dodge, but the Gryphon showed off its leisure as it easily avoided.

Electrocuted, the Hippogryph fell to the ground.

But it was still alive.

Even when I ordered them to standby, Marcus-san and co. ran up.

"Ooooy!"

"Please flee!"

"As if we could do that! Even we're…!"

The Second spoke.

『Yeah, I'm getting a bad feeling about this one.』

The Seventh spoke.

『Lyle, leave the killing of the Hippogryph to these guys. You just take on the Gryphon.』

I immediately gave out orders.

"Then please take care of that Hippogryph. It's still alive and kicking, exercise the utmost caution!"

Saying that, I looked to the sky.

Peering in our direction as it drew a circle in the air, it seems the Gryphon still had me set as its target. The sharp glint in its eyes met with my own.

The Sixth spoke.

『Hahaha, it's staring at you, Lyle! Nice. That's a sign you've been recognized as one of the strong!』

That didn't make me happy at all, but I rushed forth, drawing my sabre in my right hand, and concentrating magic on my left.

I let out electricity a couple more times, but the Gryphon dodged my attacks.

(He's a troublesome one!)

While thinking myself shameful for never imagining a flying enemy to present this much trouble, I saw the Gryphon taking a nose-dive at me.

❼

… On Lyle's words, Breid and the rest had surrounded the Hippogryph.

"Hey, isn't it fine if we just pierce it with a spear?"

"Nah, it's safest to drop its head."

The leader-ish man saw that the two alongside him were nervous, so he had presented out his spear first.

There, Breid stopped him.

"What do you think you're doing!? These sorts of monsters sell for much more with fewer external wounds. Also, there are plenty of nobles who enjoy to stuff them. We have to go for its heart."

The leader-ish man looked at the Hippogryph.

"Heart? No, how am I supposed to know where that is? Before it

starts moving again, let's just…"

Perhaps Marcus was of the same opinion, as he was holding up his spear.

"Finish this already, and move on to the next. If we stay here any longer, it's not like we'll be earning more."

Breid took his own spear, aimed it, and stabbed in.

"… How loathful for our opinions to align, but truly, standing here makes nothing. Let's head out already. Also, please remember I'm the one who killed it while preserving the body. "

Marcus looked at Breid, and clicked his tongue.

"It's already burnt the hell up, though."

Breid looked at the Hippogryph Lyle had burnt up with his magic with annoyed eyes.

Even the things that he usually wouldn't pay much mind to became unnecessarily detestable when Lyle was involved.

He drew out his spear, and wiped off the blood before running off.

"Oy, wait up! I'm the damn leader here!"

So as not to lose, Marcus ran towards the north side, and the party of three followed behind.

… The fact that the Hippogryph's front leg had twitched, was a fact missed by all five…

12 - One on One

… Finally breaching the north gate, the flock of monsters burst in with the orcs at the lead.

And before them, Aria held up her spear.

The orcs ran into the stockades, and the pitfall traps lining the gate's inside.

The stakes fastened to the bottom of the traps spelled the end of a number of monsters, but some buried ones used their comrades as footholds to jump up, and cling to gaps in the wood stockades.

Soldiers and knights with spears thrust at them, but unlike with the east gate, they supplemented their forces here with pure numbers.

They weren't able to prepare oil in time, and all they could set were simple pitfalls.

A messenger came running to inform the line of the situation in the center.

"The Gryphon headed to the center! A Hippogryph to the east!"

Grabbing hold of the panicked runner, Aria confirmed the state of things.

"Explain it properly! There were two Hippogryph, right? Where did the remaining one go!?"

Out of breath, the messenger continued.

"The Gryphon and a Hippogryph… to the representative captain's place…"

Representative captain… that likely meant Lyle.

(Just two at once? I'd been sure they'd attack with all three.)

Aria looked to the sky, and found the flying beasts were no longer

visible.

Witnessing a flash of magic, she could do nothing but believe Lyle was holding on alright.

“We’re holding on fine here, so tell him not to worry. Reinforcements from the east have also…”

It was at that moment.

The fencing was toppled over, and the monsters began to pour in.

With her spear held ready, Aria turned around to pierce an approaching goblin, and swung the shaft in a large arc to free the monster’s body from her weapon.

The messenger drew a little away, but Aria spoke.

“We’ll take care of things here, so tell him that! Quickly!”

Watching the man run off, Aria looked at an orc, who had taken up one of the logs forming the stockades as a weapon.

He knocked away the soldiers nearby, and headed straight for her.

(Can’t they even learn to take some distance!?)

“Fall back!”

The fencing that had been constructed at top speed was more fragile than she thought, and the hole in it was soon filled in with monsters.

As Aria held her spear up to the orc, melee battle began breaking out left and right.

Those troublesome orcs poured in one after another, and one of them suddenly collapsed with an arrow in its head.

“Clark-san?”

Coming down from his place on the wall, he stood in front of a line of knights and soldiers, as he released his crossbow on the monster.

And leaving that crossbow on the ground, he pulled the sword at his

waist.

“We’ve run out of arrows! Archers, ready your shields!”

The soldiers held up unshapely boards of wood, and while they repelled the attacks from the front, soldiers from behind stabbed through the gaps in those shields with their pikes.

Forcing back the monsters, the man himself was taking on an orc.

“He’s not half bad.”

Aria used one of her Skills to cut down an orc herself. Blood spread around her surroundings, and the clash of metal and the cries of battle were beginning to get loud.

“All injured, pull back! Never let the battle become one on one!”

Clark issued orders, and the surrounding troops began to make a comeback, giving Aria some freedom of movement.

And after that, it came down to her specialty.

“Aha! There you go!!”

There was the scene going around about her, and excited by the sight of blood, Aria swung around her crimson-stained weapon.

A body enhanced by a Skill.

A spear hardened to increase output.

She raised her speed, and slaughtered one monster after another.

Seeing her form on the battlefield, Clark muttered to himself.

“… What prowess. What valor. If only that one was a man, then…”

What a waste, he murmured…

❼

When I dodged the Gryphon’s claws as it dove towards me, they

caught onto the quiver strung across my back, lifting them with it into the air.

The beast tried to gain altitude by flapping its wings, but an impact from the quiver blew it off course, and caused it to concentrate its attention on it.

(Did one explode? I really have to be careful with their use.)

Glad that it hadn't exploded while still on my back, I aimed at the quiver full of exploding arrows, and held up my left hand.

"Lightning!"

The magic enhanced by a Skill hit on the mark.

But the Gryphon merely landed on the ground, shook off the impact, and returned to normal.

(So it was insufficient? I should've hit it with something harder.)

While I thought that attack hadn't had an effect, the Second offered me some advice.

『Looks like it go back to the sky immediately… It's working. Well, it'll probably be right as rain soon enough, though.』

The Fifth spoke.

『Ah~ right, Gryphons did have that magic resistance of theirs. But it's more potent than I thought.』

"Then with all my might…"

I would use my trumpcard. At that moment, the Second spoke.

『Fool. Don't think it's a sitting duck on the land. Look, it's coming your way.』

It swiftly began running in my direction. Its lion body moved with great flexibility, and leapt straight at me.

I ran forward, and rolled, passing right under its bulk.

The Second spoke.

『A fatal blow with magic… it'll be possible with my Skill, you know, Lyle.』

The moment he said that, I dropped my Sabre, grabbed onto the Gryphon's tail, and used a Skill.

"If it's Full Burst, then…!"

The Skill, 【Full Burst】… a Skill to multiply one's own abilities several times over… Using that, I tried to grasp its tail, and throw it, but when I did that, its rear legs struck down on my face.

I tried stopping the blow with my left hand, but felt my entire body rise into the air.

But in that moment, I didn't release the tail grasped in my right.

Perhaps it was good that I jumped back, as it killed the momentum, and I was sent flying onto the beast's back, tail-in-hand.

My left arm hurt, but the bone had yet to break. While I was drawing my spare sabre, the Gryphon started to thrash to get me off.

The back of the Gryphon reeked of beast…

The Sixth spoke.

『Aww yeah, one on one, the battle of a true manly man! This is what I've been waiting for!』

"Shut up!"

I grasped its neck with my left, held onto the sabre with my teeth, and produced a rope from the bag at my waist.

I had prepared it upon hearing the Sixth's opinion, but I felt a strange feeling of defeat.

The rope was made into a loop from the start, and I tossed it around the Gryphon's neck, giving it a strong pull.

My ears began hurting from its shrill screech, so I wrapped it around my left hand so as not to let go. That hurt quite a bit as well.

“Che, then right hand it is.”

I wrapped the right instead, and took the sabre in left when the Gryphon began to flap its wings.

“So it can fly like this. Let’s finish it…”

The Third gave a warning.

『Ah, yeah, make sure you do it in one hit. The blood will make it slippery up there. Also, if it takes to the sky, make sure you land the final blow somewhere that looks easy to land, or…』

“Why do you all sound so relaxed! I’ve nothing to be lax about here!”

As I said that, the Seventh responded.

I understood his blatant enjoyment from how hard he tried to sound serious.

『Lyle, men are those that grow from fighting a worthy foe. It’s because there are strong ones out there that we’re all able to grow strong ourselves. And you see, it’s natural for a Walt man to be able to do this much.』

While thinking over just how many things were wrong in that, I wrapped my legs around the rising monster.

If I’m thrown down in the air, it would be dangerous even with the rope.

I pulled hard on the rope around my right hand, and the beast shot straight into the sky.

The air up there was much colder than on the land.

Atop the back of the Gryphon desperately trying to shake me off, I was able to see the surroundings.

The scenery changed, the sky below. The ground was above me, and I realized the Gryphon had gone into performing several barrel rolls in the air.

“If I fall from this distance, I’ll die, won’t I! Bastaaaarrd!”

With my sabre still held, I used magic, and released electric discharge from my body. As the Gryphon continued thrashing in the sky, the scenery continued changing without end.

It continued spinning, and I clung onto it for dear life.

I get the feeling its movements grew a little duller when I used magic, but even so, it wasn't dropping altitude. It was dead set on dropping me to my death.

The Third spoke.

『Oh, how high.』

The Fourth too.

『If we could freely do this, it'd become quite a business… Useful for both pleasure and transport…』

What about worrying for me!? I stomached those words, and took a cloth from the bag I had brought along.

I sheathed my blade, and used magic to wet the fabric., before throwing it over the Gryphon's head, successfully robbing it of its vision.

The Sixth spoke.

『You wet it to freeze it on, did you? Not bad!』

The Fifth…

『If it falls from this height, it'll be the end… huh? If you just soaked it from the start, it wouldn't be able to fly that high, would it?』

"… Say that from the start!!"

Screaming, spiraling, I used Skills to forcefully cling on to its back…

As we were up in the sky, I went through many sensations I usually never would have felt a number of times.

I never thought I would become this anxious just from having the ground so far.

The dread of falling was one thing, but not having somewhere firm to plant my feet was quite a…

“Just… fall already!!”

I created more discharge with magic.

The reason I didn’t wet it now was because it was ridiculously cold.

My own body wouldn’t be able to bear it, or more so, I wouldn’t be able to move. Also, clinging on would become a pain.

The Gryphon’s body wasn’t burnt at all. But it was surely working, as the force it was turning its head with weakened.

It unsteadily began its descent, and I struggled to use the constricting rope, and my legs around its torso to attempt to steer it.

(Ah, I can see the village. Now just like this, I’ll stab its heart… wait, where the hell is that supposed to be!?)

As I found myself stuck over where its heart was supposed to be, the Second offered advice.

『Lyle, here’s a general rule of thumb. It’s where the bones are structured to protect. Just find a gap in the bones, and stab in.』

“And here I am, ignorant to such a place!”

『Fool, what do you think my Skills are for?』

Taken aback, I used the Second’s Skill. Full Over’s effect was about to cut off.

I had used up a large quantity of magic, but even so, I could understand where my enemy’s heart was.

The sensation of a strong light pulsating.

Within that glow, the strongest light, and clenching my sabre in my left hand, I tried to set my aim on that spot.

(Dammit, it’s starting to get hazy.)

I used too many Skills, and I get the feeling my mana had been

scraped to its bare bones. While my altitude fell, and the village grew closer, I noticed the battles there were coming to an end.

The ground continued closing in, and thinking this drop would be a survivable one, I pierced the blade into the Gryphon's body.

After piercing deeper and deeper, the Gryphon let out a screech, the likes of which I had never heard before, damaging my ears.

I pulled out the sabre, and blood spilled out with good momentum, and the Gryphon began dropping towards the north gate.

"This one…"

And in the next moment…

『Lyle!』

Along with the Second's voice, I directed a look to the village's center.

The Gryphon collided with a wall, and my body was thrown into the air.

❼

… The moment of victory was closing in.

The number of monsters dropped, and Shannon knew of the flashes of Lyle using magic in the air.

At the east gate, where she had hazarded a worried glance for her sister, she saw the Hippogryph had been left in quite a sorry state.

"… A little repulsing."

Thinking she would have to be even more wary of Miranda than before, she turned to Norma nearby.

She had only been looking at her sister the whole time, and only heard Norma's reports of the flashes in the sky.

Norma spoke.

“Never knew one could fight like that.”

In response to that, Shannon shot back.

“He’d never do that normally. Perhaps his head’s been hit?”

Norma nodded to that, but from her point of view, if Lyle could win like that, it would be her chance for success.

No, she’d definitely be promoted. That’s just how large the achievement was.

Norma was grinning.

“Looking back now, our luck’s been on the better side. The Gryphon brought more monsters with it than anticipated, but you can also call its scale small. Compared to taking on a Gryphon, this cattle was but a tasty morsel.”

Shannon looked at Norma a little amazed.

And she spoke.

“I’m not really one to speak, but can’t you do better than that? If you keep at life as you are now, you’re sure to fail eventually.”

There, Norma made a sad face for a moment, but soon took up her usual condescending gaze once more.

“Are you an idiot? This world isn’t one for pretty words. It’s one where it’s the one who’s been fooled’s fault for being fooled. That blue haired boy will surely someday come to regret conceding his feats to me.”

Shannon thought.

(No, I doubt he really minds it.)

In truth, Lyle’s sense of achievement was quite off kilter.

This time was the same, but the individual himself’s outlook was too different.

Shannon recalled the six lights floating about the boy.

The battlefield was gradually quieting down, but Novem, conducting healing in the center station, was becoming busier. Monica was also moving busily with emergency rations and odd jobs.

The battle headed to its conclusion, and hasty villagers began popping out their heads.

“It’s no good for them to come out, isn’t it?”

Norma spoke.

“The battle may be over, but I guess I’ll send someone to have them fall back.”

Norma ordered a nearby messenger to tell the civilians to return.

Shannon looked to the north.

Her sister Miranda had been at the east, so she hadn’t really been paying it mind, and on the north, without even a Hippogryph, the battle with the greatest manpower was being conducted.

Rather than relieved, Shannon felt from the start that the danger level was low.

And looking in that direction, Shannon…

“Eh? He’s alive.”

Hearing that, Norma asked…

“What? Is there someone injured…”

To Norma, Shannon responded in a loud voice.

“The damn Hippogryph is alive!”

Hearing that, Norma opened her eyes wide…

❼

… The surroundings grew quiet, and the villagers taking shelter resurfaced.

When the villagers came out, Luka and the other children followed behind.

“Won… we won!”
“They protected it! Our village’s been saved!”
“Thank the gods. Truly, thank them…”

Giving the screaming and weeping adults a sidelong glance, Luka looked around, and found Lyle’s bow stuck upright into the ground.

The string had snapped, and worried, the boy rushed out.

By unfortunate coincidence, it was only after that occurrence that the runner came and made all of the villagers return to shelter.

Having run out, Luka approached the bow, and found relief in the fact that Lyle wasn’t collapsed somewhere near it.

“That’s good. Looks like Lyle-sama’s safe.”

But a portion of the ground was blackened, and he found the quiver had been ripped to shreds.

“H-he’s alright, right?”

Recovering the bow, he nervously looked around, before hearing an intense crashing sound coming from the north.

There, he saw the figure of Lyle moving his hands atop the immobile Gryphon.

“Amazing! As I thought, Lyle-sama’s amazing!”

And near Luka’s quivering hands, the Hippogryph leisurely raised itself…

❼

In a slightly northern part of the town’s center.

Having collided with, and crashed through a wall on the northern side, the Gryphon wasn’t moving in the slightest.

And I ended up spotting Luka outside.

Worried for me, Clark-san came over.

I knew he would be worried after I was thrown of the beast that crashed into the north wall. But there was something more important for me.

“Lyle-kun, you shouldn’t stand yet!”

I was unsteady from the impact, but still, I managed to muster up a loud voice in Luka’s direction.

“Get away from there! Run!”

Aria lent me a shoulder to stand, but Luka likely thought I was only waving, as he held up my bow, and waved back.

Around, there were plenty of knights and soldiers who assumed the battle was over, and many of them were beginning to go on about who defeated who.

They were stuck up in the impression it was all over.

Behind Luka, I could see the form of the Hippogryph slowly raising its body.

And the Second spoke.

『Oy, you understand it right… the situation!』

The memories the Second had shown me abruptly revived in my head.

Of him clutching his deceased eldest, and crying out.

But no one here had noticed it.

And even if someone did, there wasn’t one to make it in time.

I grit my teeth.

(Why… it was all going so well, right… so why!?)

『The hell you lamenting for!? There’s things you can do, and you’re

going to save that kid.』

The Second's voice was desperate.

『Are you going to show that scene to me again!? If you did that, I'd never forgive you, ya' hear!? Lyle! I'm begging you… save him!』

I hung my head, and put power to my own feet.

(… I already know that.)

I raised my face, and unsteadily separated myself from Aria, standing on my own legs. And I heard the Second's scream.

『You can't put a living and a dead man on the same scales! I'm already dead and gone! I've already told you all I've wanted! That's why… that's why… you can't have a kid die before my eyes again!』

I resolved myself.

My aching left hand grasped the Jewel, and pulled at it, as if to rip it off my neck.

But after the chain fastening it disconnected, it entangled itself around my hand, and the Jewel began to give off a light.

The silver ornaments expended, and took on the form of a large bow.

A silver bow with the blue Jewel stationed at its center.

But that silver arc had no string to pull.

As the surroundings went into an uproar, Aria let out her voice.

"A bow? I'm sure it was a large sword before…"

Clark-san was also surprised.

I brought my right hand to the Jewel, and after it let out some light, a string came into being.

When I readied myself, and pulled it, an arrow of mana came to be as well.

That pale blue arrow took on a clearer shape the further and further I pulled it back.

『Right. That's how it should be. Use my Skill… Lyle. That Skill is already yours.』

While pulling the bow, I was gritting my teeth. A mortifying and sorrowful feeling.

I didn't want it.

I mean…

"That's right… I was… but I didn't want to part anymore…"

When I muttered that, Aria spoke.

"Lyle, you're crying…"

And a single knight noticed, and shouted out.

"Oy! The Hippogryph is…!"

And everyone's eyes fell on the figure of the beast behind the flustered child poised to attack him at any moment.

『Thanks, Lyle… it was fun.』

The form of his embarrassed smile came up in my head, and I used the Skill.

"Select…"

A Skill to decide those I would grant Skills to.

Even if a jumbled mess of enemy and ally were to fight around me, it was a true support Skill to make Skills operation for allies alone.

Conversely, it could also grant things to enemies alone.

It discriminated a moving battlefield, and made it so anything, be it Skills or magic, would hit their mark. I can't say it would guarantee complete accuracy, but… it held quite a high precision.

The Second said he used the Skill to notch multiple arrows, and hit

several separated targets at once.

The third stage of the Second's Skill…

With the Hipporgyph as my aim, I released the bow.

The Second…

『… Do your best.』

(Why…)

The magic arrow of light flew straight to the Hippogryph.

The moment it was released, a wind swept about around me.

(… Why…)

Luke finally noticed the monster behind him, and turned around in fear.

(Is that something to say with such peace of mind? I wanted… to learn so much more… It's not like I can tell you not to disappear…)

The arrow drew a trail of light, and after going through the Hippogryph in its straight line, it continued off into the sky, even opening up a hole in the clouds.

Luke had fallen onto his backside, and when I undid my stance, the silver bow vanished, leaving the chains stuck to my arm.

The Jewel let off a blue light, and my knees fell to the ground.

"L-Lyle!"

"Bring a stretcher at once! Quickly, Lyle-kun's…!"

I heard Aria and Clark-san's voices.

Supported up by Aria, I let my tears flow as I whispered.

"I… never got the chance to say good bye… Second Generation…"

As my consciousness grew further, I get the feeling I could almost see the figure of him walking away, his right hand raised in parting.

In self derision: 『I was just the plain one of the lot, so a plain end like this is best for me』.

13 - The Second Generation Head

Within the Jewel.

When I opened my eyes, I found myself sitting in my chair, with the conference room extending before me.

Where the Second once sat.

The chair had disappeared, and the door behind it was gone as well.

The First had left his sword to me.

And the Second, a silver bow.

In the room, there was only me and the Third. The other ancestors didn't show their figures.

『… It sure looks like father's bow. I don't think it was this big? No, can you change its size? How interesting.』

Like that, he directed a smile at me, but I was unable to respond.

When I hung my head, he laughed.

『What? You're still beating yourself up over it?』

I put my feelings to words, bit by bit.

"… I never gave a proper farewell. Even when I could use the Skill from the start."

Could he have been angry?

Could he have felt fed-up?

That's what I thought, but still with a smile on his face, the Third gave a cheerful tone.

『You're reading too deep. He must have been happy in the end. I'm

also thankful of you from my side. I mean, you let me see a scene of my brother being saved. I was happy.』

Raising his face, the Third stood from the table.

『I was the second son. As long as my diligent brother did his best, I thought it would be alright I did whatever I wanted. But I took it too far. On a rainy day, I went outside… using the bow he learned from father, he came to protect me.』

To a knight, a bow wasn't a worthy weapon.

In the world of nobles and magic, a long distance attack, and spells, were one and the same.

Relying on any more would make others think one lacked power themselves.

"Third, what did you think of the Second?"

When I said that, he kept up his smile.

『A little nosy, perhaps? For me, he went as far as to prepare both a bride, and a plan to develop the land, and that's because he thought I was unreliable myself.』

It seems he had some complicated feelings about it, but the Third added on a 'but'.

『But even when my brother died because of me, he never blamed me for it. Even when it would have been better if my brother succeeded, he said it was all his fault… it's because that man was a pessimist by nature. Ah, I ended up laughing when I heard he was the most plain. I mean, I saw him working so hard to build the base.』

Unpopular among the people, the weapon in his hand unbefitting a noble. Without even a proper evaluation given to him, he was the man simply stuck between the First and the Third.

"I'll never forget the Second Generation Head."

『Hahaha, if he transcended time to receive an assessment from his

descendants, then I'm sure he'd be happy.』

My feelings became just a little bit lighter.

(… I'm sorry, Second. Causing you trouble to the end.)

While I apologized in my heart, my field of vision headed for a space slightly above the table.

I looked at the bow.

It glowed a silver color, and let out arrows of light. That bow quietly floated above the Second's space.

A hunk of a sword for the First, and yet a bow for the Second…

It seems that the two of them weren't even able to converse for a long while.

The weapons the two of them used existed as if to signify that relation.

"Was the reason the Second chose the bow a rebellion against the First?"

When I said that, the Third tilted his head.

And after understanding what it was I was trying to say, he burst into laughter.

『Nope. And even between father and child, we're all still human. There's nothing that perfect out there. They may have their complaints, and I'm sure there are things they didn't like about one another. And that was particularly strong with the Second and our Founder. But you see…』

What the Third explained was the reason the Second chose the bow.

『Even when I chose the sword, father never said anything. I was sure he'd tell me to continue training with a bow, but he never pushed strongly for it. That's why I ended up asking.』

"The Second did say you'd never do anything unnecessary."

The Third nodded.

『I mean, it'd cut into my free time. I really don't want to put in any unnecessary effort. Oh, right, the reason the Second chose a bow right? Apparently it was to follow behind the First.』

(Then why not a sword?)

Perhaps sensing my thoughts, the Third spoke.

『It sounds strange, right? But you see, he always wanted to stand beside him, and kept on failing… that's why he wanted to support the First from behind. Perhaps he admired him?』

Swinging about that large blade of his, butchering up monsters, the first surely was cool.

His way of life that cut open the path to the Walt house with nothing but his sword was, while something riddled with problems, something that drew people to him.

The Third spoke.

『The end was a little dubious, but he said what he wanted, and got to see a boy that resembled his son be saved. Don't you think it all worked out, looking at the result?』

Being asked that, my chest began to hurt.

I did have some apologetic sentiment.

If I had been a little more reliable…

If I had dealt the final blow myself…

Marcus-san and the other's faces played back in my head.

The Third called out to me.

『Lyle, do you hate Marcus and the other men?』

I checked through my own feelings. Even when I thought hard about it, I could only think up a childish rationale.

"… I hate them. But it was also my responsibility. I have no idea

what to do.”

『Then just hating them is fine. Of all else, from our side, the side of those that use others, they’re nothing but trouble. It’s because they can’t even properly do a job that’s been left to them. Trying to get a promotion like that really is laughable.』

The Third’s expression became serious.

『They’re the type the Second hates. I’m sure that if he were here, he’d shout at them even if he knew they couldn’t hear it. When you think of it like that, that female knight Norma sure is excellent. If she found a nice superior to follow, I’m sure she’d have become a fine knight.』

I asked the Third how I should go about dealing with them.

“So what should I do?”

『About their treatment? In that case…』

I decided to adopt up the Third’s proposition.

❼

… Novem confirmed Norma’s report.

By Porter’s side, she had revised it several times. Around them, collecting materials from the monsters, and treating the injured was getting quite hectic.

Repairing the walls was also necessary, and as a punishment for ignoring orders, Marcus, Breid, and the others were assigned to assist with that task.

Novem let out a sigh.

“It’s no good. Why does your name pop up so many times it seems like overkill? When one would think you were at the eastern front, you’re suddenly giving out orders up north. Also, the number of monsters defeated here is wrong.”

Hearing that, Norma objected.

“If I don’t do this much, I won’t stand out!”

Novem gave a clear-cut answer.

“This report has absolutely no credibility. If you don’t write something they’ll be satisfied with, you’ll be labelled a fraud.”

“B-but…”

The role of the commander wasn’t to fight at the scene.

Even when she knew that, Norma took to sticking in her own service all over the document.

Resting with a bandage around his head, Clark sighed as he tried persuading her.

“Captain, defeating the Gryphon is undoubtedly an indisputable achievement. Also, the village was protected with minimal casualties… this may not be the best way to put it, but three deaths is ridiculously low. There’s no doubt that you’re going to get promoted.”

According to the man, if she wasn’t promoted for defeating a Gryphon, there would be problems for the imperial side.

Because henceforth, if they would no longer expect a reward for defeating such beasts, the knights and soldiers would experience quite a large drop in motivation.

Having achieved quite a visible result, Norma would surely rise up.

No, if she didn’t the future criterion would become a mess, or so he explained.

And Clark looked at Novem.

“I think it’s fine if you plan to sell the monster corpses to replenish the five hundred gold coins expended, but even if the Gryphon was in a good state, I doubt you’d get such a sum, you know?”

It was about the money scattered around in this time’s monster

subjugation, but having knights and soldiers accept it wasn't that good for reputation.

The fact that commanding authority was transferred was also a problem.

The money itself was spread in the middle of a town, so it wasn't something that could be concealed, even if they tried.

That's why, on paper, Norma's troops borrowed money from Lyle, and paid back their debts with the corpses of the Gryphon and Hippogryphs.

Novem hadn't asked too much into the circumstances surrounding that field, but it was something Lyle did, so there was no helping it.

"Well, it's Lyle-sama's orders. Now, Norma-san, you have to write a report covering everyone's efforts."

Of the work of her subordinates that numbered over a hundred, and of how hard those deceased had battled on. Norma had to continue churning out reports.

Clark wasn't in a position to write them, so Norma had to do it under Novem's tight surveillance.

She had completed the preliminary stages of healing, so as she was quite familiar with documents, Novem was chosen as inspector.

Norma continued grumbling out complaints.

"All of them… those five are unnecessary, right? They didn't finish off a wounded Hippogryph, you know. A critical miss. I think it's something to merit a demotion, honestly."

Norma's own promotion was riding on this, so it wasn't strange for her to try ending up as the sole winner.

For that sake, close to her…

"Look, just write it already. Otherwise, I'll make sure to properly report it to father. Of just how hard you were working."

A grinning Shannon was sitting right before her.

While sipping on a drink, she seemed to be having fun staring at Norma's dejection.

"… I never heard that a daughter of the Circry House would be here!"

"That's because we never told you. By the way, she also has an elder sister here, so if you don't uphold your promise, you're sure to face retribution."

On Novem's threat, Norma confronted the paperwork once more.

Her hands were stained in ink, and the miswritten documents were building up quite impressively.

"I just have to do it, right!? Right!"

While letting out an irritated cry, Norma wrote on.

Seeing that, Novem gave out orders.

"Don't write down your own name! You were commanding from the center station, so why are you suddenly giving oh-so-precise instruction at the north gate!? Get it together!"

Seeing just how often her reports were likely ridden with lies, Clark began to feel a different pain in his head besides the injury he had suffered to it…

❼

I watched Luka aim at the target, and fire his arrow.

He was pulling it back with all his strength, and sweat was pouring down his brow.

That form of his somewhat overlapped with the scene of the Second's memory.

When the arrow hit the mark, Luka burst into joy.

"I did it! With this, I wonder if I'll ever be like Lyle-sama!"

Having seen me defeat the Hippogryph with the silver bow, Luka seriously took up learning the bow in order to be like me.

It's been two days since the Gryphon fell, but I left the work to Novem, and the rest of my party, devoting myself to Luka's instruction.

"You'll surpass someone like me in no time at all. This isn't even my specialty… but that's a nice arm you've got there."

When I praised him, he was overjoyed.

Nearby, Clara prepared some books with her Skill.

"Lyle-san, I've finished making them."

What Clara was holding were copied books.

She had committed some books aimed at children on the three Rs to memory, so I had her reproduce them.

Since we had been in Luka's family's care, the paper and ink were something we prepared ourselves, and handed over.

"T-there are this many?"

Luka looked at Clara with a slightly tedious expression.

I'll bet he's poor at studying, but I told him that he had to if he wanted to turn out like me.

Clara smiled as she spoke.

"The letters are large print, and quite easy to read. There are even illustrations, so I think you'll have no trouble understanding it. Perhaps it's a good idea to get the assistance of someone who can read."

He was about to return the bow to me to take up the books, but I spoke.

"You can have that one."

"Eh? But…"

With a replaced string, I handed over the bow to him with my remaining arrows.

I get the feeling that would have made the Second happier.

“I already have a bow of my own. And that one’s a little small for me, so I’ll let you use it.”

“Yeah!”

Seeing him hold up the bow in joy, Clara laughed.

And I tried asking something that had been bugging me.

“Clara, how long will it take for those books to disappear?”

There, Clara responded with a full-on smile.

“… Lyle-san, there are some things in this world best left unknown. Now let’s just say that someone knew how to make a copied book last for eternity. Wouldn’t there be quite a few troubled by that?”

Hearing that, I was surprised that a way existed for a Skill-copied book to never vanish.

From the Jewel, the Third let out his voice.

『… Oh my, this girl is just getting cuter and cuter.』

To the book-loving Third, Clara must truly be his ideal woman.

And she laughed, saying it was a lie.

“So it’s not possible?”

“No it’s not, or more so, a copied book will disappear once the one who used the Skill dies. For example… if an important document was placed under the charge of such a Skill holder and they disappeared, wouldn’t that just be terrible? And this Skill is generally one that only emerges in book-lovers. If its use leads to a bad future for the book, I think a majority would never wish for it.”

In this case, it doesn’t seem there were any problems on Clara’s side.

The Skill wasn’t omnipotent or anything.

“… So those that manage to master it are strong…”

When I muttered the words the Second told me once before, Clara tilted her head.

While looking at Luka joyously holding up his bow, I spoke.

“No, it’s nothing.”

Epilogue

… The expeditionary force was seen off by the waving hands of the villagers.

Having protected the village from a Gryphon attack, they even went as far as to assist in mending the damages, and the civilian's impression of them was drastically better than when they first got there.

Casualties did surface, but it was much more decent than annihilation.

No, asking for any more would be simply greedy.

Within that, Aria sat in Porter with a blanket around her.

"… It's… really heavy."

Within Porter alongside her, were Shannon, Miranda, and Monica.

Shannon was playing with Monica, and Miranda was slumped, dead-tired.

It was all fine up to the banquet.

The knights and soldiers celebrated their victory, and the villagers joined in, drinking, and making merry…

The problem surfaced the next day.

A large change came about in Aria and Miranda.

At first, they thought it was simple fatigue, but their bodies felt heavy.

Their moods had also fallen, and they didn't want to move.

Because Lyle and the rest had been doing various things in the village, they were allowed to lie down, and rest.

But after it had continued on for a couple of days, they figured there

was surely something strange about it.

As Aria began feeling worse, Monica spoke to her.

“If you’re going to hurl, I ask you do it outside. I’ve no mind to clean up a mess besides one of my chicken dickwad’s.”

As Monica said that with all earnesty, Aria stuck her glare on her.

“Oh, you really like Lyle, now don’t you.”

Aria stood up within Porter, and looked outside.

Behind, the Gryphon was being preserved in a block of ice.

It had few wounds, and was taken out in a single blow, so it was carefully preserved for its high profit prospects.

But it’s quite likely that would never reach up to the five hundred gold they had lost.

In front, Norma was mounted on a horse, leading the troops with an enervated expression on her face.

Those who had yet to undergo a complete recovery.

Those killed in action were loaded on a horse cart, and taken along. Lyle and the rest of the party were walking close to Porter.

Novem was talking as she walked, while Clara was sitting on Porter’s roof, operating the golem.

But Marcus’s group wasn’t alongside them.

(But there’s no helping it.)

After the banquet, various things had happened, and they began taking distance.

Aria looked at Novem conversing with Lyle, and thought back to what happened when they left the village.

At the time of parting, Lyle had been talking to the boy from the village.

He was the boy Lyle had looked after all throughout their stay, and Lyle even went as far as to bestow his weapon unto him.

Seeing his kind face to a child, Aria found it unexpected.

(So he isn't just kind to women.)

Finished gazing outside, she sat down on a wooden crate inside Porter, and saw Miranda wriggling around.

She let out her face, and was making a terribly dark expression.

To put it bluntly…

(Uwah, how scary!)

Even Aria made a repulsed expression.

She was always all smiles, but since the end of the battle, it didn't seem she had such leisure.

She only directed a forced smile whenever Lyle was around.

And having even lost her usual courtesy…

"… Shannon, water."

"Y-yes!"

Shannon hurriedly prepared water, and Miranda rose to drink it.

Her light dress was soaked in sweat, and perhaps she wasn't feeling the best. Her expression held no elegance.

After the banquet.

Miranda had severely rebuked Marcus and his group.

It's likely because she didn't like how Lyle hadn't pressed them any further for their slip up, and even submitted a report that could lead to a promotion as promised.

The Hippogryph hadn't brought about any casualties, and in the end, Lyle was the one to deal the final blow.

The way he didn’t seem to mind it too much must have irritated her.

And besides business-like conversations, Lyle no longer involved himself with Marcus’s group.

Having finished the water, Miranda wiped her face, looked at Aria, and spoke.

“What?”

She would usually say that with a smile, but now she glared with sharp eyes.

It may have scared her in the past, but the current Aria had grown up a bit.

“Nothing really. You looked like you were in pain, so I was looking at you. In that state, I’m surprised you can still make a smile in front of Lyle.”

Aria had meant that in jest, but as she herself was also feeling under the weather, she wasn’t able to make it show in her tone.

And unable to smile, Miranda reacted by twitching her eyebrows. Shannon began shaking in fear.

Looking at that, Monica…

“Oh, is this a scene of carnage? How nice. I was just getting bored, so I wanted to see one in person, you know. Now the two of you, fair and square, the muddy soap-opera fight of two women in love… Fight!”

When she began working herself up, Shannon tried stopping a smiling Monica.

“You, don’t be starting a fight in a place like this! And what the hell’s a ‘soap-opera‘!?”

“It’s something like a play. Now on with the live carnage!”

“This one’s strange in the head!”

… She was broken from the start, so it was only natural…

When Miranda tried to stand, they heard a knock on Porter.

After a while of silence, Lyle opened the door.

The golem had halted movement, so it was likely break time.

Aria spoke.

“Is it already time for rest? On the way here, we only stopped at lunch, right?”

When Lyle poked his head in, Miranda continued making her pained face as she formed a smile.

“I proposed that we take breaks more frequently. Also, there are some that want to defeat monsters along the way to rack up some numbers.”

Defeating monsters along the way, those that were barely able to perform on the battlefield could earn some merits.

And Lyle decided to buy up the materials and magic stones from that.

Lyle spoke.

“Are the both of you alright? I’ll take up watch today too, so just rest at ease.”

Miranda replied.

“Sorry for that.”

(… Miranda, she’s quite dark herself.)

While looking at Miranda, Aria thought that. Suddenly, Shannon fixated her eyes on Lyle’s chest.

“… The light moved…”

What was this girl saying?

The question surfaced in her mind, but without her usual composure, Aria ended up letting herself rely on Lyle.

“I’ll leave it to you. And wait this time’s really heavy. I’m scared for what’s to come…”

The high tension resulting as a reaction from Growth.

The results varied by the individual, but perhaps Aria and Miranda had surpassed the maximum permissible level of experience, as it was taking their bodies quite a while to get over it.

Aria didn’t let by the doubtful reaction Lyle made for an instant.

(He’s surely remembering his own Growth.)

With a smile on his face, Lyle spoke to the four inside Porter.

“If you want to go outside for a change of pace, then I highly recommend it. Monica, Shannon, you two are to help with work outside.”

Normally, Shannon would hate it, but because of the mood inside, she almost burst into the great outdoors.

While Lyle made a surprised face, she begged for him to give her some work.

Monica walked outside, and while she was closing the door…

“We’ll make sure not to get in your way, so take your time.”

…. Said that.

Perhaps she was waiting expectantly for the two to fight. Her smile was quite irritating.

Neither Aria nor Miranda wanted to fight of their own wills.

Both of them wrapped blankets around themselves, and rested their bodies…

❼

Separating from Porter, I looked up at Clara.

“You sure that was alright?”

“Yes. It would be troublesome if they went on a rampage inside Porter.”

Shannon and Monica took up their work, and I talked to Clara.

It was something I already knew, but this party was lacking in numbers.

In all seriousness, I wanted to recruit a few in.

Around us, there were many a soldier with the same pained expressions of Aria and Miranda-san.

We stepped off the path, and lay down by the roadside to rest.

I heard the Fifth’s voice.

『You’re using the Fourth’s Skill to compensate for movement speed. It’s quite a large force, but Lyle’s mana should be able to deal with it.』

Perhaps they had gained confidence in their abilities, as a large number of soldiers and volunteers took the initiative to go out and engage monsters.

Our movements as a group were much better than at the start, and we had achieved a victory, so the mood wasn’t bad.

The Third heedlessly…

『I wanted to promptly stick it to Norma at the start, but looking at the result, it turned out perfectly fine.』

From my point of view, as we had casualties, I couldn’t really call it perfect.

I do think we reduced the damages to the least we could, but even so, deaths arose.

(If only I had done a little better…)

When I made a complex face, the Fourth spoke to me.

『Lyle, I hope you're not thinking you could've gone about it better, right? Even if you do what's needed, there will be deaths and damages. Thinking that your efforts could've prevented it all is nothing but arrogance.』

And the Sixth agreed.

『Right. Regretting after it's all over won't get you anywhere. If you did it the best you could, then stick out your chest.』

I'm not in that sort of mood.

(Those standing at the top sure have it rough.)

When I got a taste of that feeling, I experienced just how heavy having responsibility was.

The Seventh…

『This is another good experience. I thought it would be a boring job, but it looks like Lyle's learned an essential lesson.』

… At the start, it was a request from the Circry House Head.

A frail unit was to take on a Hippogryph, and it was expected that many casualties would surface.

But in truth, the opponent was a Gryphon, and annihilation was more than possible.

I recognized once more my own naivety.

(The voices I can hear have decreased…)

The First, and now the Second's voices were no longer there.

When I took the Jewel in my hand, Clara called over to me.

"Lyle-san, did something happen?"

I couldn't go about giving the whole truth, so I offered her an excuse.

"I was just a little curious about Luka. I wonder if he'll properly study."

As I said that, Clara smiled.

“He was quite enthusiastic, and after he learned a little, he was quite delighted. Ah, another thing…”

“What?”

While Clara was making her usual expressionless face, I noticed her complexion was a little pale.

“Are you feeling ill? Then take a rest at once…”

“I’m sorry. I’m, well… looks like it’s come for me.”

Come?

When I started pondering her words, Novem raced over.

“Lyle-sama! Over sixty percent of the troops have been hit with degradations to their physical states. We did obtain a large amount of experience, so perhaps it will go on to spread to the entire corp.”

For an amount of experience too great, or an experience one had never gone through before, there were several common patterns of how the body dealt with it.

The Second said it, but there’s the case where my physical condition collapses completely, and after that, I revive.

And there’s also the case where the body instead takes its sweet time processing that experience.

“This is bad. Let’s hurry to the next town. There, we’ll stay a night or two, and observe the…”

After I said that much, I get the feeling some expectant glances were directed at me from within the Jewel.

In a small voice, the Third…

『… mr. lyle…』

Whispered.

(I-it’s alright. I don’t feel any different this time. I’m the type that

needs an enormous amount of experience to go through Growth.)

I took a deep breath to calm myself.

There's no such change going throughout my body.

I don't feel heavy either.

"A-anyways, let's pick up the pace. Dispatching one knight to explain the situation, and building up preparations would be best."

I did have some leisure with my previous payment so I'm still fine with gold.

When I started thinking of whether or not to fork over money…

The Fourth gave a proposal.

『Ah, right… while we're at it, why not spread a little rumor?』

The Sixth spoke with intrigue.

『Oh? Perhaps that would be nice. It's not bad for our return to be a little late.』

Following the flow, the Third…

『Then it's decided. It's at times like these that the troubadours… those singers make it so much easier.』

The Seventh…

『Yes, before those imperial rats can make a move, let's cement it in legend. It will spread to the Capital soon enough. Even if we're unable to move for a time, we can at least spread some hearsay. By the time they set out to control the situation, it'll be too late… wonderful!』

Troubadours were those that spoke of affairs of the world and stories. At times they would sing, and at times, show off their technique.

A majority of them were elves.

Their race mainly lived in the forest, but as a nation of hunters, they

didn’t really form settlements. No, perhaps it’s more correct to say they couldn’t.

Because of that, they would sing songs as they travelled, and earn some money by polishing their skills, and showing them off.

Their way of life was one easy to make fun of, and there were quite a few foreign spies who infiltrated among them, so they were refused the right to settlement.

“Lyle-sama.”

Novem looked at me with worry.

“I-it’s nothing. Let’s send someone ahead first. After that, if there happens to be a troubadour in the village, let’s try spreading the details of the incident to them.”

Novem put her hand to her chin in thought.

“Perhaps that would be nice. But there’s no guarantee you’ll find one there.”

“We’re just on the level of, ‘it’s nice if one’s there.’ No need to worry too deep into it. If the village seems starved of good entertainment, we can spread it ourselves if we really want.”

Deciding to move as such, we sent out Clark-san alone to find the nearest village ahead.

(Even so, it will become troublesome if even Clara becomes incapable of movement.)

Before we returned to the Imperial Capital, I wanted everyone to be back to normal.

❼

After spending two nights at the village and departing, as expected, a strange air began to envelop the camp.

Aria…

“I… want to become a bird. I want to fly on and on in the open skies.”

Miranda-san was in agreement.

“Ah, I totally get you there. Lyle, won’t you be my bird cage?”

I gave an immediate response.

“I have no idea what you’re talking about.”

Clara held her hand to her mouth as she…

“Ah, I see, so you want to hold that spear as your wings, and hop around the battlefield some more? I get it. Miranda-san, how about you go get yourself jailed already then?”

Clara isn’t a girl to say such things!

That’s what I thought, but the surrounding soldiers…

“When I return, I’m going to propose to the girl back home!”
“If it’s now, I think I can thank mum for all she’s done for me! Thanks for givin’ birth to me!”
“… You guys, I’ll pretend I didn’t head that.”

The final soldier looked upon the bright men with a dark expression.

Looking at the scene, Monica spoke.

“I wonder what it is. It’s interesting, but it’s nowhere near the level of the chicken dickwad when I first met him. Each and every one of them’s got a foot on the brakes.”

She did seem a little tired, but more so than anything, she was sending some expectant glances in my direction.

On Shannon’s side…

“Help me! Aria’s started reciting a strange poem, and onee-sama’s started prattling on about the meaning of love and life and all that jazz! It’s unbearable!”

She clung to me in tears, but I averted my eyes.

“Surely you jest! Just what are you expecting me to do!?”

Suddenly, Aria…

“From the noble lady of a baron fallen down to adventure. Oh, woe is me… Powerless I am, I swing my spear, yet that gallant soldier a guise it be. If you will take my penny, I’m more delicate than any, and starving for love as all.”

As she directed fluttering glances at me, I averted my eyes.

Clara was…

“Even for a former lady, one who gets excited at the sight of blood, and would have likely been a general by now had she been a man can’t be called powerless. Rather than starved for love, are you not thirsty for blood?”

Miranda-san…

“Ah, why is it these burning feelings in my chest can never get across to Lyle!?”

She looked at me, and her expression was quite serious, so I averted my eyes once more.

Clara…

“It’s not that they don’t get across, but that you’ve been flat out rejected, right? Reality sure is a cruel mistress.”

Crushed by Clara’s harsh objections, the two of them seemed to sink into past events they wanted to forget.

Novem spoke.

“This time’s Aria-san is quite severe. Lyle-sama was quite a trial last time, but for her to be this… at most, she would sing some of her self-composed songs, and that would be the end of it.”

I looked to Novem, and spoke.

“Eh? I never heard of any of this.”

“No, you were out cold.”

If I knew, I would have been able to grasp at her weakness… while thinking that, we reached the exact halfway point to Centralle.

And…

(An enemy? Two orcs.)

Thinking that, I looked to the direction the enemy was at.

We did have lookouts stationed, so the reaction of the troops was fast.

“Two orcs! They’re coming towards the center body!”

It looked like the two were headed to the center of the group.

We all stopped and entered preparations for battle, but everyone was in a dangerous post-Growth state.

The knights as well.

“If it’s now, I can beat an orc with a single knife!”

There was even an idiot who voiced something like that.

(I guess I’ll take care of them here.)

“Novem, I’ll handle them. Force everyone to wait on standby here.”

“Eh? … Y-yes!”

Rather than surprised, it seems she wanted to say something, but she put that on hold and abided my orders.

If it’s just two orcs, it won’t take any time at all.

That’s what I thought when I headed off to defeat them.

❼

After the aftermath of the Orc battle.

I was lying down flat on Porter's loading tray.

"W-whyyyyy!!!?"

I suddenly couldn't muster any power in my body, and that was accompanied by a pain I had never felt before.

On top of sore muscles all through my build, my Mana was too used up, and I felt my consciousness would drift somewhere far away.

Even letting out a loud voice brought pain to my body, and looking after me, Monica looked quite delighted.

"Nursing the damn chicken to health… I won't concede such an important role to any other."

Shannon spoke.

"And no one else wants it."

Inside Porter, me, Monica and Shannon rode.

Outside a merry expeditionary force was marching on, and the symptoms of Growth came to visit me right after the orc battle.

The Third raised an expectant voice.

『Finally! It's finally here! mr. lyle is!』

The Fourth carried out some calculations.

『At this rate, it'll be before we reach Centralle? No, perhaps once we've barely arrived…』

The Fifth…

『This boy's timing is…』

The Sixth.

『Lyle's sure got it. Besides luck, this sort of… pff…!』

Continuing on from the laughing Sixth, the Seventh as well.

『The first Best Lyle in a while… I get the feeling I can get my hopes

up.』

I muttered.

”D-don’t screw with me… this time, I won’t be meeting anyone. Definitely. I’ll definitely lock myself in!”

My voice rose in the latter half, and Shannon looked at me, fed up.

“Are you sure your head’s alright?”

Monica was…

“Even if you try to do that, I’ll be by your side to the end. I mean, that’s the duty of Monica, the finest automaton masterpiece!”

Resolving myself to lock myself away once we reached the capital, I endured the pre-Growth pains, and waited for the time to go by.

I had seen Aria and the others’ pitiful displays not too long ago, so I’ll absolutely make sure nothing happens this time.

(I ain’t going outside at all! There’ll definitely be nothing to make the ancestors burst into laughter! Right, I’ll never make the same mistakes again!)

Question Corner

Q: You won't use【Mind】on the Circry House's old man?

A: Third Generation Head ヽ(´ー`)ノ: "There's a restriction placed on its use. Well, this is also an important lesson, and I didn't think he'd die on something of Hippogryph level, so I decided to wait and watch. Even if he did use it, I doubt it would prove anything, and for the current Lyle, he may make those he uses it on wary of him."

Q: Is Norma actually skilled? Or hopeless?

A: Fourth Generation Head (-@∀@): "… To put it bluntly, incompetent. If she had tried to make handing over commanding rights any more difficult, I would've made her a field casualty."

Third Generation Head (･ω･): "But she did have something going for her. If she had a better environment to grow, I think she'd have become skilled. She's sharp on how to survive, and she's willing to change her point of view. Unfortunate, perhaps?"

Lyle (´･ω･`): "By the way, she's not joining the harem. I think Novem would oppose. And wait, even if it grows any further, I'm still going to be devoted to Novem."

Aria (゜д゜): "…"
Miranda (゜д゜): "…"
Clara (゜д゜): "…"
Shannon (゜д゜): "…"
Monica (゜д゜): "…"

Novem (･ω･`): "Oh my… looks like a little… training is in order."

Q: About the education of second and third sons. The characters appearing in this work are just plain stupid. It's simply obvious to educate them properly in the case something happens to the first son.

A: Fifth Generation Head (゜д゜)、: "It's natural for their parents to educate them? There's quite a bit going on in a fantasy world, you know (Monotone). Huh? Could it be that everyone's properly educated and you're the one living in a fantasy?"

Sixth Generation Head Σ(´∀`||;): "U-um… even in reality, those besides the heir are sent off to the church on occasion, and taken back in when the first son passes. Personally handling their education is up to the individual. Yeah!"

Seventh Generation Head (･ω･`): "It takes alms and contributions and money. Education is the same. And wait, the knights incapable of heredity, and the far end knights are poor. If they were all decent, the expeditionary force would never have been sent out to reduce the mouths to feed. Because if a war is to happen, those sorts are going to find an abundance of work."

Fourth Generation Head (-@∀@) : "This is probably about Breid and Doris… Breid is basically a third child without heredity. A position where rather than the studies of a knight, he should have been thinking of how to live a civilian's life. Everything besides reading, writing, and arithmetic were likely unnecessary. No, more so, a family that even taught him that must have treasured him quite a bit? Also, about Doris and sister… There are those that see girls as fine as long as they could birth children. In the truest sense, she was Miranda's spare."

Q: Is Lyle actually talented?

A: Seventh Generation Head ΣΣ(゜Д゜;): "He's an able child! Lyle is a capable one I tell you! Because he's competent, he can't understand the feelings of those who aren't, and he's just lacking in socialization

dammit! A pitiful boy!”

Lyle (´;ω;`): “Grandfather, please stop… you’re making me sad…”

Q: The ancestors are strange. In the first place, if they made Lyle stand out, he’d be conspicuous to all the wrong eyes. They let him take on a request with little merits, riddled with demerits, and let him make a completely unnecessary expenditure.
The fact that you’re using the ancestors to forcefully move along the story without thinking of means and goals is becoming much too blatant.

A: Third Generation Head (゜∀゜): “Ah, yes, it truly is just as you say. He sure does stand out~ (Monotone). He starts standing out even if he doesn’t want to~ (Sparkle Sparkle).”

Fourth Generation Head (-@∀@): “No, I don’t think I really care if Lyle stands out or not. I think the Sixth and Seventh in particular still want him to flashily take back the territory, so perhaps they thought it best if he did? Also, everything’s an experience. Wouldn’t it have ben fine if he failed? More so, I think that piling up this sort of experience is a cheap buy.”

Sixth Generation Head (▪∀▪): “It’s best you don’t think that the best actions will always result in the best result. Failing when you can, and learning from it is just as important.”

Q: Clark is too proficient. Why can’t he get a promotion?

A: Fifth Generation Head (´▪∀▪`): “Well, there’s quite a bit, but I think it’s his disadvantageous personality. Individually, I think he’s wonderful, but in the world, assets and connections are a necessity for promotion. Rather than the knights being rotten, there’s too many

people that getting a promotion is hell.”

Seventh Generation Head (´∀`): “… If a war broke out, he’d get to the top in a flash.”

Q: Marcus and Breid’s punishment.

A: Sixth Generation Head (`・∀・´): “No change! Just get them promoted already. That way, you’ll raise hell on the damn imperial bastards. Flood them with incompetents!”

Third Generation Head (´・ω・`): “… Unlike Lyle, they had little opportunity to learn, so I do pity them a little. There’s no need to look after them all the way through, and if they don’t wish for it, there’s no meaning.”

Q: Celes’ stay in the Imperial Capital.

A: Fifth Generation Head (・∀・): “The Walt House occasionally drops by the capital, but Celes is not currently taking an extended stay there. I’m not sure about the future, though.”

Q: About the yellow gem

A: Lyle(゜д゜): “No comment.”

Q: That Growth joke is something of a one-shot gag. I’d like it if you stopped.

A: Third Generation Head (゜∀゜): “Well too bad! That’s the setting the world’s built upon, and mr. lyle will continue to appear! No matter who hates it, mr. lyle will come!”

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